

HENRY GREEN:
THE UNSTABLE VISION

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

The aim of this thesis is to offer a critical rereading of Henry Green's work which directly addresses its disconcerting versatility. It is my contention that instability is central to his work, and directly accounts for his increasingly abstract trajectory. Over the course of the thesis I hope to locate and assess the various contributory factors to the evolution of what I have defined as Green's 'unstable vision', and to track their influence throughout every aspect of his fiction.

The first chapter looks at how Green's autobiography tests the concept of a stable self and influences his subsequent representation of character in his novels, where the human subject is increasingly exposed as a construct of words, dissolved in the structures of language and society. In the second chapter I examine the idea of instability as stimulus, looking at how the unstable vision was nurtured during a wartime London under bombardment and blackout, a state of flux which Green would reinterpret as an 'absolute gift'. The third chapter is divided into two parts of which the first half assesses Green's proto-structuralist investigation of the printed word, a progressive questioning of language and textual representation; whereas the second part examines the instability of voice, narration, and authority in Green's fiction. The fourth of my chapters offers a structural analysis of Green's texts, assessing the presence of structural irregularity and temporal friction in the fiction which, I propose, constitutes an unstable aesthetic, in which errors and inconsistencies are regarded as desirable. Finally, chapter five specifically focuses upon Green's novels and theoretical statements from the 1950s, showing how the unstable vision reaches its corollary in his stringently 'non-representational' novels, *Nothing* and *Doting*. These novels aspire to a new 'absolute minimum' which, I contend, directly anticipates a new development in fiction, the French *nouveau roman*. Through this intriguing convergence I hope to suggest how Green's epistemological uncertainties potentially bridge the gap between his modernist heritage and postmodern thought.

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Last but not least, I thank Henry Green for his novels, which continue to give me and, I hope, others too, great pleasure.

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis represents entirely my own work, and has been neither submitted previously nor published in any form.

List of Abbreviations

1. Texts by Henry Green (for full details see bibliography, section 1)

<i>Ba</i>	<i>Back</i>
<i>Bl</i>	<i>Blindness</i>
<i>Ca</i>	<i>Caught</i>
<i>Co</i>	<i>Concluding</i>
<i>D</i>	<i>Doting</i>
<i>Li</i>	<i>Living</i>
<i>Lo</i>	<i>Loving</i>
<i>N</i>	<i>Nothing</i>
<i>PG</i>	<i>Party Going</i>
<i>PMB</i>	<i>Pack My Bag</i>
<i>Su</i>	<i>Surviving</i>

2. Material collected in *Surviving*

1920s and 1930s

'Adventure'	'Adventure in a Room', pp.6-13.
'Arcady'	'Arcady or A Night Out', pp.26-27.
'Bees'	pp.3-5
'Evening'	'Evening in Autumn', p.63.
'Excursion'	pp.64-74.
'Fight'	pp.59-62.
'Monsta'	'Monsta Monstrous', pp.21-25.
'Mood'	pp.28-47.
'Saturday'	pp.51-58.
'TTAL'	'Test Trial at Lords', pp.48-50.

‘Wyndham’ ‘The Wyndham Family’, pp.14-20.

The War Years

‘Apologia’ pp.90-97.
‘AR’ ‘A Rescue’, pp.77-82.
‘Lull’ ‘The Lull’, pp.98-110.
‘MJ’ ‘Mr Jonas’, pp.83-89.
‘TOL’ ‘The Old Lady’, pp.111-14.

Others

‘AF’ ‘The Art of Fiction’, pp.234-50.
‘ANR’ ‘A Novelist to His Readers: 1’, pp.136-42.
‘ANR2’ ‘A Novelist to His Readers: 2’, pp.143-50.
‘AWD’ ‘A Writer’s Diary’, pp.179-83.
‘BGF’ ‘Before the Great Fire’, pp.260-79.
‘CPW’ ‘The Complete Plain Words’, pp.184-87.
‘FFPM’ ‘A Fire, a Flood, and the Price of Meat’, pp.151-57.
‘FJA’ ‘For Jenny with Affection from Henry Green’, pp.284-85.
‘Great I Eye’ ‘The Great I Eye’, pp.121-27.
‘HG’ ‘Henry Green’, pp.131-32.
‘JL’ ‘For John Lehmann’s Programme’, pp.163-65.
‘Memoir’ ‘A Memoir *by Sebastian Yorke*’, pp.286-302.
‘SWW’ ‘The Spoken Word As Written’, pp.170-73.
‘UN’ ‘An Unfinished Novel’, pp.251-59.
‘Unloving’ pp.280-83.

3. Interviews with Green (for full details see bibliography, section 1)

'Breit'	Harvey Breit, <i>The Writer Observed</i> .
'DL'	Nigel Dennis, 'The Double Life of Henry Green'.
'GWE'	Alan Ross, 'Green, with Envy'.
'NTH'	David Lambourne, "'No Thundering Horses": The Novels of Henry Green'.
'SG'	Simon Blow, 'Silent Green'.
'TII'	John Russell, 'There It Is'.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Reading Henry Green, his friend James Lees-Milne suggested, was like 'walking down a long lane shrouded with bosage on either side, hoping, hoping for a turning which would reveal ultimate sunshine and sense'¹. In similar fashion Rod Mengham prefaces his authoritative critical study of the fiction by reminding the reader that Green's 'persistent removal of perspectives and lines of approach cuts short the possibilities of interpretation'². Green himself claimed that the serious artist 'must always be changing his own style so as not to be trapped by the clichés which he is continually creating for himself' ('ENF', p.23). Given the protean nature of Green's work - so diverse in terms of style and methodology - it inevitably follows that any attempt to explicate his texts must come to terms with this disconcerting versatility. What I have termed Green's 'unstable vision' firstly seeks to address certain problematic issues in the fiction. The concept of instability, I argue, is integral to the 'Henry Green' project: Green's ever-changing texts embrace various locatable forms of instability as creative stimuli, as well as being themselves prototypically 'unstable' - varied in idiom, narration, style and structure. His autobiography tests the concept of a stable self; wartime London under bombardment and blackout is reinterpreted as an 'absolute gift'; while the constituents of the novel itself - language, narrative and meaning - are areas Green's body of fiction persistently questions.

Secondly, I argue that the concept of instability offers a way of reassessing Green's work in the light of this curious mutability. The lack of a fixed point has always posed a problem for critics - Holmesland unifying the texts around a montage-based reading; Mengham using the 'idiom of the time'; Salmon arguing for the constant presence of a 'sexual animus' behind the fiction. These are valid insights; but they do not consider whether diversity *itself* may well be, paradoxically, the main organising feature of the fiction. This thesis offers a critical rereading of

¹ 'Henry Yorke and Henry Green', *Twentieth Century Literature* 29:4 (1983), 387-92 (389).

² *The Idiom of the Time: The Writings of Henry Green* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p.ix.

Green's work in which discontinuity and instability are taken as the central point of study. I hope through this to demonstrate how this unstable vision develops and quickens, progressively advancing his vision towards a point of stringent 'non-representational' ascesis, as represented by *Nothing* and *Doting* in the early 1950s. The unstable vision, therefore, offers a way of accounting for Green's restless inventiveness, his flair for creative *bricolage* apparent in his eclectic borrowings from other genres and idioms. 'The novelist is a communicator', Green wrote, 'and must therefore be interested in any form of communication' ('AF', p.248). He accordingly experiments with the novel form, aiming to go, as he put it, *beyond* - a creative *Weltanschauung* which in desiring to surpass the novel readily draws upon other artistic media, particularly from the cinema.

Thirdly, it is this thesis' contention that in these final abstract fictions, aspiring to a new 'absolute minimum', Green expresses a representative mistrust which directly anticipates new developments in fiction in France later in the 1950s, now known as the *nouveau roman*. This is a crucial convergence which this thesis hopes to address, explaining how authority is progressively eroded and language becomes increasingly suspect within Green's work, a trajectory which inevitably leads to his final novels, and also points towards the French new novel. In *Nothing* and *Doting* the movement away from linguistic innovation is as complete as the rejection of the inner life: for Green's final fictions are stubbornly abstract, infused with pseudo-scientific theories of fictional construction, and championing a deliberately surface interpretation. In order to explain this convergence I consider how Green's modernist credentials - his interest in form, and attentiveness to new styles, languages and fictional conventions - steadily deconstruct his fictional approach, which moves progressively closer in spirit to (post)-structuralist thought.

While Green's work predates structuralism, it contains many important methodological points of similarity - his sceptical presentation of the human subject as a construct of language and social structures, decentred and prone to numerous misidentifications and blurrings of identity, in texts which increasingly prize structures at the expense of individuals. Green's epistemological uncertainties, therefore, potentially bridge the gap between modernism and post-modernism, which

is why the late novels' close similarity to the fictions of the *nouveaux romanciers* is as intriguing as it is significant.

Various sections in this thesis will consider aspects of Green's work which fit this reading: its self-generating inconsistencies; Green's interest in borrowed discourses, illusory hierarchies and structures, and equivocal mimeses. Green's obsession with meaning and fondness for teasing the reader with welcoming patterns, the 'web of insinuations' so characteristic of his texts, repeatedly satirizes the process of constructing meanings and connections. His work explores the arbitrariness of meaning, destabilizing conventional assumptions and expectations of textual genres.

I have taken care to avoid the obvious pitfalls of taking Green's stubbornly *sui generis* novels either one by one, or in structurally-related groupings, preferring instead to examine the central themes of the unstable vision in five distinct chapters. The first four primarily focus on the fiction between *Blindness* and *Concluding*, leaving Green's theory and novels from the 1950s to the final chapter. Chapters one and two take specific incidents - Green's decision to write an autobiography in 1938, and the impact of the Second World War on his work - and argue their thematic importance in the fiction as crucial contributions to the unstable vision's development. The next two chapters, on the other hand, concentrate on areas of the fiction vital to the comprehension of instability in Green's work: his deconstructive linguistic practice, unstable narrations and narrating voices, and curious methods of textual assembly and structuration. The separate strands analysed in these chapters are then brought together in chapter five, which argues the final novels' significance as precursors to the *nouveau roman*, and examines the culmination of the unstable vision.

The thesis starts with an assessment of the strange dualities and dichotomies within the 'Henry Green' project, scrutinizing the function of the writing persona, before looking in detail at its effect first on his autobiography, and then upon the fiction as a whole. For the conclusions reached about the nature of self and self-representation have important implications for the rest of his work, providing the initial framework

for the unstable vision, grounded in the contradictions of persona and in Green himself, so 'deeply divided both as man and artist'³. It is my contention that Green's problems with the self as autobiographical subject are symbolic of wider difficulties over self and writing, key potential discontinuities which contribute to the development of the unstable vision and are increasingly manifested in his fiction. The second half of the chapter therefore closely examines the representation of character throughout the fiction in the light of *Pack My Bag*'s insights into a self which appears remote, unattainable, and fundamentally unknowable. Green's autobiography enacts a depersonalization which will be repeated in subsequent novels, which offer ways of dismantling a human subject exposed as a construct of words and dissolved in structures of language and society. A central concern of the fiction is, as *Party Going*'s Evelyn puts it, "'What is it makes [people] different?'" (p.145). The human subject is, in Green's fiction, typically destabilized by a variety of external as well as internal factors: his characters are prone to psychic collapses, or mysterious identifications with others; as well as duplicated *in* others, as evidenced in the numerous doubles and mirror-images in his novels. The instability of the self is a theme which resurfaces throughout the thesis; in the second chapter's consideration of wartime fragmentation under extreme situations, in chapter three's discussion of problematic linguistic attribution; and finally in the last chapter's examination of *Nothing* and *Doting*, where the self is in a state of exhaustion, decentred and subordinated to vitrifying textual structures.

The second of this thesis' chapters argues that the experience of London at war was essential to Green's development as a writer, effectively nurturing the unstable vision. This would be his most prolific period as a writer; and came, moreover, at a point when he had written but one novel in the preceding decade. While most writers found the war years either actively unsettling or downright oppressive, Green instead found the idea of 'things breaking-up' intensely stimulating, and declared that the war was an 'absolute gift' to the novelist. His texts, stressing this point, typically address precisely those themes elsewhere avoided or criticised as worn-out by other

³ Andrew Gibson, *Reading Narrative Discourse: Studies in the Novel from Cervantes to Beckett* (London: Macmillan, 1990), p.136.

writers and critics. The idea of instability as stimulus is vital to Green's war writing: war catalysed a creative reanimation explicable as a bizarrely fortuitous collision of private obsessions and historical circumstances. Green unsurprisingly found the idea of instability immensely exciting, and his texts carefully document the physical destruction and social upheaval provoked by wartime existence. In such settings the human subject appears fragile, subjected to intense pressure, particularly from the recurrent threats of enclosure and entrapment. In addition, the war-texts display Green's awareness of other artistic mediums, his ability to draw upon the visual stimuli of blackout conditions and cross-refer to parallel developments in film and painting - a flexibility which, as we shall see, proves to be increasingly relevant to the unstable vision's development.

The third and fourth chapters attempt, using the tools of Genettian narratology, to examine how Green's texts function, linguistically and structurally - a crucial area of Green's work neglected by most contemporary criticism. Using Genette's categories of voice, mood, order and frequency I hope to provide new insights into the way Green's work may be interpreted, and also to demonstrate how the unstable vision can be tracked and interpreted through close examination of the texts.

The first of these chapters is divided into two halves. The first part looks at how Green's quintessentially modernist fascination with language and its possibilities shades slowly into distrust, examining his use of language, and the problems of writing and reading encountered in his novels. Yet his manipulation of language, I suggest, is double-edged. Green returns time and again in his theoretical texts to the writer's need to destroy the reader's automatic gaze, yet he is just as compelled to dismantle language, or 'short-circuit communication'. His work, Green declared, represented 'an advanced attempt to break up the old-fashioned type of novel' ('DL', p.84). Andrew Gibson talks of a 'transgressive force' which traverses Green's work, where narrational syntactic disorders, non-standard grammatical usage and erratic punctuation subtly derail a communicational enterprise further sabotaged by the inability of characters and narrating agencies alike to engage in successful discourse. This is at its most pronounced in 1946's *Back*, a proto-structuralist investigation of the printed word, codes of language, and the relationship between signs and their

referents. The second half of the chapter expands these insights by examining the narrative act in the light of Green's epistemological scepticism. To narrate is as problematic a textual function as it proves for his characters, given Green's repeated questioning of authority, and destabilization of attribution. The question 'who narrates' is never easily resolvable, since a bewildering series of different potential sources are intimated: personalized, unreliable "narrators" vie with less identifiable voices in fleetingly assuming responsibility for narrative statements (occasionally apparently echoing the idioms of characters); an extreme which contrasts to the ostensibly impersonal narrational idioms, in which narration provides a textual function, which elsewhere predominate. The chapter, drawing in particular upon Bakhtin's concept of textual *heteroglossia*, discusses Green's awareness of the plurality of all discourse or speech acts, his sensitivity to different idioms, idiolects, and systems of register, arguing that his novels are consciously unstable structures, the sum of numerous competing textual languages and slippages of idiom and language. The unstable vision, therefore, is symbolized by Green's central receptiveness to diverse styles, contradictory positions, unresolvable alternations between potential sources, dissonant strategies of focalization, and wildly fluctuating levels of access and narrational privilege.

Chapter four specifically examines the structural values of Green's texts. In this assessment of the fiction (excluding *Nothing* and *Doting*, discussed in the following chapter) my analysis seeks to provide insight into Green's methods of structural assembly, in particular to demonstrate the unpredictability of Green's narrative practice. Concentrating on *Living* and *Caught*, Green's most structurally ambitious novels, as model texts, I will be making a case for the centrality of structural irregularity and temporal friction to the fiction, demonstrating Green's unorthodox use of time and order, and assessing the role of textual insertions, overlapping chronologies, and incompatible temporal sequences. Close analysis reveals a range of errors and discrepancies which vary from the surreptitious to the blatant and, I suggest, form the basis of an unstable aesthetic, which prizes discrepancy above coherency, and offers clear and tangible evidence of the unstable vision's impact on the fiction.

The final chapter of this thesis ties together the insights explored in the previous areas discussed. In *Nothing* and *Doting* all authority save structural organisation is renounced. As a result of Green's developing scepticism of language and representation his work instead embraces new structural extremes. Geometry, circularity, repetition and polyphony complete the process of depersonalization in the fiction, reducing Green's characters to the status of *actants*, enmeshed by their roles and rotated within scenes which serve a primarily structural, relational purpose. *Nothing* and *Doting* represent the corollary of the unstable vision, but in so doing they also point the way forward to new fictional developments made by the *nouveaux romanciers*, an achievement all the more impressive when we consider the general indifference to issues of style and experimentation in Britain during the 1950s. This thesis seeks to bring into sharper focus the frequently neglected achievements of these texts, and to provide a comprehensive reassessment of their merits and historical importance as a precursor of the 'new novel'. To this end the chapter examines the crucial areas of convergence between Green and the new novelists: their shared hermeneutic concerns; the attractions of abstraction and a 'surface representation'; their mutual scepticism of description, character, language and plot; and their shared metafictional obsessions.

Finally, I consider the curious paradox that, in advancing to an abstract point which represents the logical culmination of his unstable strategies, *Nothing* and *Doting* nevertheless discover in this final attenuation a way of protection *against* instability. Green's geometries, I suggest, are as much protective as they are inevitable. They take his vision 'further' at the same time as they offer a stay against that same fragmentation which has produced them; they can be regarded as formalistic endgames acted out against the backdrop of an imperilled world of post-war austerity - 'in a sort of let-down, still alive', as Green put it ('SG', p.8). Certainly Green's own theoretical statements fear the inanimation which is 'probably the first sign of dissolution', of an abstraction which he fears will end in silence - for the experimental novelist, he declared, 'must take care not to let it go too far' ('AF', p.245). The unstable vision, therefore, culminates in a logical artistic stalemate, resulting in the protracted silence between *Doting* and Green's death in 1973.

1 MAPPING THE UNSTABLE SUBJECT: *PACK MY BAG*, PERSONA, AND THE PRESENTATION OF FICTIONAL CHARACTER

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The first section of this chapter examines Henry Yorke's assumption of the 'Henry Green' writing persona which, I argue, is not only a far from innocuous stratagem, but absolutely crucial to the development of the unstable vision. Green's work as a whole expresses clear unease about the act of writing, identity, origin, and the nature of fictional character - central questions in the unstable vision which particularly come to the fore in his 1940 autobiography, *Pack My Bag*, with its highly curious metaphors for persona, self and writing.

I propose to start with a brief discussion of the 'Green' writing persona, putting its potential functions into context. Many privileged writers of the post-Great War generation felt a clearly historicisable social discomfort: Green, born into an upper-class family but with distinctly proletarian leanings, had as much reason as anyone to desire to obscure his family name. Then there are the properties of a persona to be considered: the potential separation between the self that lives and the self that writes which it enacts (a division Green, businessman by day and writer in his spare time, indeed encouraged); or the alias' obliteration of the writer's face, his proper name (symbolizing anxieties about identity, origin and selfhood which, as we shall see, are altogether characteristic of both autobiography and fiction). And we must also consider traditional ideas of the mask as a device of protection as much as projection - a particularly interesting aspect and one brought into sharp focus in *Pack My Bag*.

A basic contextual framework in place, the chapter then looks in detail at the ways in which *Pack My Bag* either brings to the forefront many of Green's existing preoccupations, or directly initiates many of the subsequent fiction's motifs and obsessions, in particular the increasingly problematic representation and constitution of character, self and identity in the fiction. For the autobiography gets into distinct

difficulties with both self and its representation, and, partly as a result of this, with the autobiographical genre itself. Green's approach to autobiography is as idiosyncratic as it is fundamentally deconstructive. He brings unorthodox strategies and strictures to bear on the genre, sabotaging this experiment in self-analysis by directly questioning the nature and authority of the autobiographical venture.

The final part of this chapter widens the scope of reference to assess the impact of this experiment in self-analysis on Green's subsequent fiction, showing how 'character' in the novels becomes an increasingly beleaguered concept in the light of repeated fractures and destabilizations. Green takes a typically sceptical approach, noting fragmentations of self which nevertheless resist redirection, as his modernist predecessors sought to do, onto a deeper level. Instead he meticulously explores its various aspects and instabilities; a decentring of the subject which intuitively anticipates structuralist definitions of the self.

1.2 ADOPTING THE PERSONA

1.2.1 'Getting past the face'

Anthropological research into primitive societies and their rituals has revealed the widespread use of masks as a means of enacting symbolic rites of passage dramas. The real-life Henry Yorke, born in 1905, would transform himself, while an adolescent at Eton in the early 1920s, into the writer called 'Henry Green'. The name 'Green' itself hints at some anthropological subtext of rebirth: the adolescent, semi-autobiographical protagonist of *Blindness* (that conspicuous, semi-autobiographical 'yell about self') himself dreams of 'the birth of a new life, of a new art' (p.52), and the novel contains many clumsy motifs of renewal, from the original working title of 'Progression', to the published section-headings, announcing metamorphoses from Caterpillar to Chrysalis to Butterfly, or from 'finishing' to 'beginning again'.

The pseudonym itself evolved. In *Pack My Bag* Green reveals that at school a '*nom de plume* was chosen, of all names Henry Michaelis' (p.163). At this stage, then, the pseudonym was yet to be fixed, as we can further see with the typescript of *Blindness*, a few years later, which would be provisionally attributed to one 'Henry

Browne'. The chain of pseudonyms, progressing from Yorke to Michaelis (*Surviving* suggests the more-everyday 'Michaels' (p.3)) to Browne before, finally, settling on Green (each and every one, however, still a 'Henry'), forms an embroidered arabesque of alternatives to the family name. We can conclude from these repeated experiments with an alternative writing name that Henry Yorke's assertion of the right to a "new" identity was both fundamental and non-negotiable. And this pseudonymous impulse never left him: some years later, briefly enjoying celebrity status in the States, Green actually checked in to his New York hotel under the name of 'H. V. Yonge', an ironic substitution of alias for alias. Not wishing to appear as the newly-fashionable author, 'Henry Green', he felt nevertheless still unable to appear as himself, instead fabricating another pseudonymous variation upon the proper name. The anecdote is altogether typical of his deep-seated unease: as with those rejected pseudonyms some thirty years earlier, Green's inveterate pseudonymity reveals an awkward relationship with the proper name, in each case changed to an equally commonplace alternative - as Valentine Cunningham suggests, a 'disguise of name - almost any disguise - was what mattered'¹.

Pack My Bag's casual qualifying observation - 'of all names' - is particularly provoking: Green, as ever, characteristically avoids any direct account of his motivations. His use of the passive voice ('was chosen') is also interesting, suggesting as it does that the entire process was, in some way, instinctual and unavoidable - themes which recur, as section 1.3.3 will demonstrate. And naming, as we shall be considering later in the chapter, remains peculiarly problematic throughout Green's novels, so preoccupied with the relationship between proper names and the identities they signify. Choosing 'Green' as a pseudonym certainly struck his contemporaries as odd. Fellow Etonian Harold Acton wrote that

to maintain his aloofness he wrote under the confusing pseudonym of Green. There are Greens of so many shades writing novels that one wishes he had selected another colour;

while Henry Reed, surveying contemporary novelists in 1946, sighed that 'the reader may well believe Green to be an occupational name for novelists in England'².

¹ *British Writers of the Thirties* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p.254.

² Acton, *Memoirs of an Aesthete* (London: Methuen, 1948), p.93; Reed, *The Novel since 1939* (London: Longmans, Green, 1946), p.30.

Although *Pack My Bag* declines to explain why a writing persona was so unavoidable, there is the obvious historical context of modernism, at its high point during the 1920s when Green was beginning his literary career. As *Pack My Bag* notes, Proust was all the rage during his student days, and modernism's key catch-phrases - 'objectivity', the 'pure' artist, or the 'impersonal' prose ideal - fashionable concepts. Key modernist texts - like Ezra Pound's poem-cycle entitled *Personae* (each poem supposedly a 'casting off' of 'complete masks of the self') and Eliot's celebrated *The Waste Land*, with its multiplicity of narrating voices - experimented with the idea of writing personae³. Yeats (a poet Green greatly admired) developed a personal mythology in which masks feature prominently as symbols of artistic creativity. The new disciple of psychoanalysis, too, helped popularise the mask. The persona, Jung wrote, represented 'a compromise between individuals and society as to what a man should appear to be'⁴, and psychoanalytic theory accordingly appropriated the mask as a symbol of the layers of the self.

What these concepts share in common is their natural correlation of persona and mask, a convergence established in Western literature by classical drama's appropriation of the mask as a conventional device of creative projection. Certainly the persona masks the self at the same time as it permits its expression - a typical paradox echoed in the term's problematic etymology, its Latin root at once an expression of the self, and a mask for that self - a duality of reference preserved in the quite different meanings of 'personality', 'person' and 'persona' in modern English⁵. Writing under a pseudonym, then, could be seen to be taking the idea of impersonality a stage further - providing a way, perhaps, of keeping the writer 'completely out of the picture', as Green later suggested ('AF', p.244).

Keeping out of the picture is something of an obsession with him, and altogether typical of the wider problems of self-recognition and self-representation which the fiction explores. This is particularly apparent in the dichotomy Green actively encouraged between his work as a novelist (as 'Henry Green') and his separate career

³ Quoted in Robert C. Elliott, *The Literary Persona* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p.8.

⁴ Quoted in Christopher F. Monte, *Beneath the Mask: An Introduction to Theories of Personality*, 2nd edn (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1980), p.20.

⁵ The Latin root, *persona*, has been much argued by linguists: 'the most striking characteristic of the term is its polysemous nature, the contradictory range of its reference' (Elliott, *The Literary Persona*, p.31).

as the businessman, Henry Yorke. He told interviewers that 'I do not want to interfere with my opportunities as a successful industrialist by revealing who I am' (Breit, p.104); 'I didn't want my business associates to know I wrote novels' ('AF', p.236). Ostensibly ever reluctant to be identified with his work, Green claimed that his pseudonym shielded him, preventing people from making the connection with his novel-writing alter ego. John Lehmann recalls how, during the war, Green refused to let him

use a photograph of him in the Penguin, for fear a fellow-fireman should recognize him and give the game away - 'I should never hear the last of it', he says⁶.

Photographs are a particular subject of unease: 'one should never be known by sight', Green stated ('AF', p.237). At Eton he scribbled on the back of a photograph of himself that

I flatter myself that this is not in the least like me: how could it be what with the irritation at the photographer and the idiocy of being photographed. I resolutely posed myself (*PMB*, pp.163-64).

In later years Green disconcertingly insisted on being photographed from the rear; the face, as in Cecil Beaton's famous portrait, averted, offering no more than the back of the head to his public. Green told Nigel Dennis that 'There is in life nothing harder than trying to get past the face, *ie.*: the appearance' ('DL' p.94). Desiring to 'get past the face' is emblematic of Green's work: the persona is a further mask for that 'flabby face' which so troubles its owner, and symbolic of the problems of self-portraiture and self-recognition which the autobiography uncovers.

1.2.2 Class guilt and ways of escape

Green felt uncomfortable with the trappings of privilege - a fairly common sensation during the 1920s and 1930s, as Malcolm Bradbury points out, for his generation of public-school educated novelists:

⁶ *I Am My Brother: Autobiography II* (London: Longmans, Green, 1960), p.171.

many writers were obviously embarrassed by their bourgeois personalities, and even, like Orwell, took on proletarian personalities to conceal it⁷.

Questions of origin, particularly the upper-class world into which he was born, a 'mouthbreather with a silver spoon', as the opening line arrestingly states, trouble *Pack My Bag* (p.5). Green treads warily around such issues; his upbringing, he evasively writes, 'was all what I take to be rich and comfortable' (p.15). Though careful not to appear ungrateful for the privileges of birth ('Of course one was lucky to have these chances'), he does qualify them by stating that he has been subsequently 'lucky to find out early on this was not the life to pine for' (p.62). The absence of material evidence, those objects which might define or 'give any line on what I was like' (p.179), is symptomatic of Green's unwillingness to be pigeon-holed on questions of class or personality; Sebastian Yorke's memoir in *Surviving* similarly recalls that his father rarely spoke about his origins. While Green told David Lambourne that the relationship between parents and children was one 'of the things in this world you can never get away from' ('NTH', p.66), a curious aspect of *Pack My Bag* is Green's evasive presentation of his family - a highly unusual feature in an autobiography covering a writer's childhood years. In *Pack My Bag* he declares, evasively, that it is 'not necessary to enter into my relations with my parents', since 'apart from the few inevitable frictions [...] we were on easy terms' (p.145). At no point does he explain his repudiation of the family name. These are interesting evasions; as clearly locatable an anxiety as, of course, the overt Oedipal sub-themes of *Blindness* and *Nothing*, the numerous villainous old men father figures, or the repeatedly problematic family structures in the fiction. Certainly the sarcastic portraits of the 'magnificent leisure' of the Wyndham and Yorke households in 'The Wyndham Family' ('Wyndham', p.19), or the sample surviving scrap of dialogue quoted by Sebastian Yorke in his memoir, suggest a somewhat different response, let alone the autobiography's reported death of his parents, 'an exceptionally muted one, quite unlike most autobiographers' treatment of the subject', as John Pilling remarks⁸.

⁷ *The Social Context of Modern English Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971), pp.138-39.

⁸ *Autobiography and Imagination: Studies in Self-Scrutiny* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul,

The pseudonym effectively disguised Henry Yorke behind the paradoxically colourless identity of 'Green' (even if the change, as with Eric Blair's transformation into 'George Orwell', apparently offers 'little obvious class-distinction' (Cunningham, p.254)). The persona, a specifically *literary* transformation of identity, presciently mirrors Green's two periods of occupational escape, as foundry worker and auxiliary fireman. Being in disguise is, naturally, part and parcel of Green's literary career, 'slumming' in Birmingham or hiding his novel-writing in the sub-station. The fiction too has its slumming protagonists, ironic self-portraits: John Haye romancing Joan; Dick Dupret bobbing between factory and high society; Richard Roe's delusions of becoming 'one of the thousand million that toiled and spun' (*Ca*, p.51). George Orwell, another man in disguise, felt that to be a successful slummer he would have to disguise himself 'so completely that at the end I should hardly be recognisable as the same person'⁹.

In real life such identifications could rarely succeed: class always gets in the way. Orwell likened class differences to a glass wall, 'so easy to pretend that it isn't there, and so impossible to get through' (*Road to Wigan Pier*, p.188; Green uses much the same image in *PMB*, p.95). Green recalled that

I got on very well with the men at the factory and the firemen. But I must say that I was very highly educated, which makes a difference both ways. A: They were suspicious because I was educated, and B: I got bored with them because they weren't educated [...] we weren't exactly easy bedfellows ('NTH', p.62).

However, in fiction, free of betraying vowels and manners, and beneath another name, the transformation into, as Valentine Cunningham puts it, 'something proletarianly other' (Cunningham, p.265), becomes possible: a notable feature of Green's narrative idioms, as chapter three illustrates, is the way in which they traverse so effortlessly and impartially a wide range of social idioms.

Escaping the rigidity of the class system is something of an obsession in the fiction, in which 'getting away' from situations is a constant preoccupation of his characters. Green repeatedly sets his texts in locations of entrapment. Blindness traps John in a world of 'no escape'; his party-goers are stuck, worrying about getting 'past

1981), p.127.

⁹ *The Road to Wigan Pier* (London: Gollancz, 1937), p.193.

frontiers and into that smiling country [...] the promised land' (*PG*, p.224); Green's Londoners are 'caught' in the Blitz; the cast of *Loving* are trapped by their fears in the neutral oasis of Kinalty. Green's first published story tells of a curate who, disastrously transplanted from a slum parish to a sleepy rural village, finds himself stuck, unable to 'get away from it all' ('Bees', pp.3-4) - the social transition a curious anticipation in reverse of Green's own exchange of milieux a few years later. *Living*, which climaxes in Lily's failed elopement, uses a directional epigram to frame the text: 'As these birds would go where so where would this child go?' (p.246). And *Pack My Bag* returns time and again to express a very real desire to get away, particularly from an educational system Green calls 'fascist', turning out adolescents no better than 'escaped prisoners' (p.17). The progression from private boarding school to Eton and then to Oxford are prerogatives from which there is 'no getting away' (p.47), and Green would accordingly seek elsewhere 'the sort of English life I liked' (p.230).

'The Apologia', published the year before the autobiography, is central to understanding Green's need to escape his own background. In it he praises Doughty's renunciation of comfortable Victorian middle-class life for the hardships and uncertainties of Arabia. Green's rereading of Doughty is fascinating. He sees him as a kindred spirit: 'One of the merits of his book is that he finds almost nothing [...] The answer must be that he had such a quality in him that he had to get away' (p.95). This despite, to Green's mind, having 'no love for those whose company he chose', far from a homeland which 'although he never says so, he liked no better' (p.92). As *Pack My Bag* wonders, 'if there is a paradise there are many natures who will always worry whether they ought not to be somewhere else' (p.213). The escaping is all, and it is this readiness to embrace the socially unfamiliar, for the sake of it, which so impresses Green. It 'made' Doughty, he declares, because it 'satisfied a need he had' ('Apologia', p.96). There are further parallels, which Green does not choose to dwell upon. For Doughty, intriguingly, was also a man in disguise - not only travelling through Arabia dressed in Arab garments, but also concealed behind a pseudonym (Khalîl).

As Green's commentators have all duly noted, the 'Apologia' is at once a manifesto for the need for war-writers to embrace the 'impact of a life strange', and a declaration of kinship, Green's experiences in his father's factory his own version of

Doughty's Arabia Deserta. Getting away, either socially or geographically (to France or to Birmingham) is the trick. The autobiography dwells upon Green's sense of not belonging, in a country in which, he confesses, he has 'often felt a stranger in' (p.230). The General Strike catalyses this sense of not belonging into definite action: 'I had to get away at once [...] I was one of the first to get out of Oxford' (p.234), driven 'to see for myself how by far the greater number live in England' (p.217). And so, rebelling against tradition, Green abandoned his degree (literature being 'not the sort of subject to write essays about'); and, apparently oppressed by, as the autobiography puts it, that 'sense of guilt whenever I spoke to someone who did manual work' (p.195), for belonging to the privileged few, went to work in his family's Birmingham foundry. Green's own name change both predates and anticipates this transition, a disguise of identity which mirrors a disguise of occupation, and his implicit rejection of a socially-invalid background which is 'not the life to pine for'.

1.3 DUALITY, SELF-DIVISION, AND COMPULSION

1.3.1 Dichotomies of the self

'The artist', Green claimed, can 'only survive by becoming a businessman', and 'only learn about art from people who are not artists' ('DL', p.86). Green's insistence on the superiority of work makes 'Henry Green' the adjunct, or alter-ego, of Henry Yorke, successful industrialist - and not, as one might expect, the other way round. Certainly, in the eyes of many who knew him, the two had little in common. James Lees-Milne spells out the divide:

I got to know Henry Yorke in the early 1930s. Henry Green I never knew at all [...] During the thirties I was not even aware he was a writer¹⁰.

Pack My Bag reveals a number of intriguing dichotomies: the bourgeois self and the

¹⁰ 'Henry Yorke and Henry Green', *Twentieth Century Literature* 29:4 (Winter 1983), pp.387-92 (387).

non-bourgeois writing other; the successful industrialist by day, the dedicated writer by night; the worker and the aesthete. It is a text obsessed with splits and dualities: between novelist and businessman; mask and self; conscious artist and artistic sceptic; past and present selves; between different worlds. As Andrew Gibson writes, this autobiography

suggests a man troubled by an acute sense of disconnection. Gaps continually yawn between self and world, different parts of the self, different parts of a life, different aspects of an event or situation¹¹.

Green's inveterately dualistic approach sees dichotomies and conflicts in everything. His past selves ambiguously occupy multiple positions, slipping between the opposed camps of 'aesthetes' and 'hearties' at Eton. He keeps his 'feet in both camps', 'too sly by far to put my eggs in one basket', living always 'as far as possible in two camps' (pp.142, 167, 231). Life in Oxford requires negotiating between 'the best of two worlds'; departing for Birmingham forms a 'bridge from what had been into what is so much a part of my life now', linking these 'two dissimilar worlds' (pp.236, 242). His enlistment in the A. F. S. entails another symbolic exchange of worlds, Green finding that 'We just all of us began to live another life in which we had an entirely different way of living' ('BGF', p.275).

These images of the self poised between contrary worlds dramatize feelings of self-division, divisions which Green's fictional characters, equally poised between private and public worlds, or trapped by circumstance on either side of the divide, powerless to 'get out of one world into another' (*PG*, p.174), similarly encounter. This theme is further explored in his novels, which, as will be discussed in section 1.5, repeatedly use motifs of doubling and division. Nigel Dennis suggests that in *Pack My Bag* 'the twin characters of Henry Yorke and Henry Green may be seen growing up together side by side, thoroughly ill at ease in each other's company'; and from this he astutely hypothesized a 'peculiar cleavage between his two ways of life' ('DL', pp.91-92). Green indeed confirms this in the Lambourne interview when, asked whether he felt any sense of conflict between these two occupations, he replied,

¹¹ Gibson, *Reading Narrative Discourse: Studies in the Novel from Cervantes to Beckett* (London: Macmillan, 1990), p.118. Subsequent references to this edition will be abbreviated in the text to *RND*.

I had to keep myself, and I had to choose between them. So I worked all day and wrote [...] until I slept ('NTH', pp. 68-69).

That Green should compare his life to a process of choosing between possible identities does suggest an instinctive compartmentalization of his life. He jokingly talks of forcing himself, after a day's work at the office, into completing a daily quota of 1,000 words much 'as a Bluebeard reaches into a drawer for dark spectacles and a wig' ('DL', p.84). This is Green's own version of having something to hide - although quite what is being hidden remains in question. The Bluebeard analogy is particularly telling, hinting that Green felt writing to be naturally compulsive, something shameful and best concealed. Not wanting his business associates to know he wrote novels Green told Terry Southern, 'It's best they shouldn't know about one' ('AF', p.237). These are highly suggestive analogies: writing is a secretive occupation, best achieved in *disguise*, wearing those metaphorical 'dark spectacles and a wig', behind carefully locked doors. The writing self, crucially, must be kept separate from one's normal social existence: the 'Green' writing persona and everyday activities do not officially overlap, the former cunningly concealed by the businessman's respectable commercial front. The tools of his disreputable creative side are kept away from prying eyes, in a metaphorical private, forbidden enclosure.

1.3.2 Self-unease, artistic unease

Green's attitude to writing itself is ambivalent. One part of him derides it as an insubstantial, inauthentic occupation, even though his career as a dedicated novelist suggests a quite contrary importance. His dislike of the so-called literary life is incontrovertible, however. Green referred with scorn to 'literary atmosphere', calling it 'a classic form of dying' ('DL', p.86). His scorn for literary clichés certainly discounts any self-mythologizing aspect to his assumption of the pseudonym (as "Green the artist", perhaps). Green characteristically suggests that creativity and things conventionally assumed to be artistic have little in common; the true artist, he states, should embrace the business ethic. Working as a businessman, he

paradoxically insists, is the real 'artistic life' (relegating writing to some subsidiary category). This is a theme *Pack My Bag* is keen to promote, and Green stresses how, in abandoning his degree (appropriately enough in *literature*), to go instead to work in the foundry, he did put his thesis into practice (even if the autobiography does not, however, dwell on the fact that he would nevertheless turn this experience into literature). Green recalls that

I had a sense of guilt whenever I spoke to someone who did manual work [...] I had a complex and in the end it drove me to go to work in a factory with my wet podgy hands (p.195).

He describes factory work - unlike writing - as 'an introduction to indisputable facts at last' (p.236), providing the antidote to those years of education and privilege, the guilt at having done 'no work for years, with my hands or my head but only with my feelings' (p.237) - that same 'uselessness feeling' of being rich and privileged which *Living* so vividly satirizes¹². In Birmingham Green remembers the 'long hours of being occupied', noting that, there is 'nothing like work to make the time go and this at regular hours governed by a whistle' (p.237). Hard physical work is his penance for being 'an idler', who has 'at last found something to occupy his mind and hands' (p.240). Such guilt implicitly targets the alternative profession of writer (that wielder of imprecise words), manually inscribing his texts with those same 'wet, podgy hands' (Green actually wrote his books in painstaking longhand several times over). Writing, he insists, cannot be compared to manual work:

the deep, the real satisfaction of making something with [one's] hands [...] has to be experienced to be believed, it is more than sensual and is obviously the purest form of self-expression (p.240).

Physical work, not writing, is the 'purest form of self-expression'. However perverse such an attitude may seem, Green does consistently maintain it, elsewhere wondering 'how little literature counts, that overblown trumpet'. Working as a labourer, he claims, is

one of the best ways to live provided that one has never been spoiled by moneyed leisure which is not

¹² When Hannah becomes hysterical her doctor prescribes some form of activity, unimaginable to her parents: 'Her mother said work? What work could she do [...] what work could she do?' (p.117). Richard Dupret tells himself 'constantly in his mind, I must work, work' (p.197).

[...] something better (p.238).

Green's neuroticism is of course, somewhat disingenuous. He always enjoyed posing, as Isherwood, meeting him for the first time in 1948, discovered. Isherwood found him 'extraordinary', and wrote in his diary:

He is the typical businessman, with a dash of the Old Etonian [...] He poses as an amateur - a 'Sunday writer'¹³.

Green similarly told Harvey Breit to describe him as 'an engineer [...] unable to make money out of his books (that's thirty bloody years now)' (Breit, p.104), a man at odds with an unappreciative universe. While the suggestion that writing must be lucrative in order to be worthwhile is tongue in cheek, both Green's unwillingness to be publicly recognised as the author of books produced under the 'Green' signature, and his ambivalent intransigence to the act of writing are indisputable. *Pack My Bag* is highly self-critical when it comes to Green's early literary career. The 'sense of importance now that the novel [*Blindness*] was to be published' deludes him into feeling like 'the only undergraduate member of an exclusive London club'. But the 'first flush of social success' (p.214) swiftly passes, allowing Green to mock his own presumption, that 'false pride I took in having a book published' (p.230), at the precocious age of twenty-one. Deciding to write is a fateful step or 'watershed', after which there is 'no turning back'. Like John Haye, Green remembers how 'I determined to be a writer, the diary I began to keep with this in view was full of loud shouts about it' (*PMB*, p.163). With the benefit of hindsight Green critically rereads this crucial time in his development as a writer. He mercilessly lampoons the Arts Society, calling it one of many social 'farces' which was 'then known as artistic' (p.142), only of interest in offering its members 'the chance to meet new people' (p.155). Green credits the Society for giving him confidence, although this is hastily qualified ('even if there was nothing in it'), and he concludes, dismissively, that 'like everyone else, I began to write a novel' (p.172). He remembers not lofty intellectual debate but farcically pretentious meetings; 'a conversation between women, whoever

¹³ *Diaries, Volume 1: 1939-1960*, ed. with an intro. by Katherine Bucknell (London: Methuen, 1996), p.404.

got up to speak only did so to show off' (p.171). 'Adventure in a Room', actually begun while Green was still at Eton, also refers slightly to the Society as 'the acme of human desires as it seemed' ('Adventure', p.7). Green's aesthetes dress and talk to startle, their behaviour likened to 'the pathetic motions made by the unsuccessful to attract notice to a negligible personality' (*PMB*, pp.112-13). Nothing changes at Oxford, where there are again 'many defections from the Society of Arts, not that any of us believed in art' (p.207). Novel writing lapses into deserved obscurity according to this strategy of self-repudiation: believing in art, clearly, is something Green is not prepared to confess to.

His chosen metaphors for the writing process are definitely curious. With 'no time to chew another book over', he writes in this autobiography, 'everything must go down [...] unattractive no doubt, thick with one's spittle' (p.12). The writer's memories, continuing the metaphor, must be 'sufficiently digested to regurgitate as doves in spring to other doves whose interest they wish to rouse' (p.165). Green's peculiar version of the art of communication is notably queasy, an over-masticated text which is 'unattractive no doubt'. Literary endeavours are similarly ridiculed in the fiction. *Blindness*'s two would-be authors are mercilessly lampooned: John's diary proclaims wild declarations of intent ("I shall be a great writer. I am sure of it" (p.191)); the deranged parson plans to write a messianic 'great book' which will 'link everything into a circle' (p.111). In the remainder of the fiction there are only two authorial figures, and neither offer much encouragement. *Concluding* has Rock, a redundant author whose theories are now obsolete and unread, while *Doting* includes an unconvincing bohemian poet, Campbell Anthony, who is suffering from a bad case of writer's block, having lately "taken a wrong turning" (p.9), with an anthology of poems (also titled *Doting*, underlining the dangers of authorship).

Reading is an equally peripheral activity. Its strongest advocate, after all, is John Haye, and he is symbolically blinded for his pains. Then there is Craigan in *Living*, cyclically re-reading the same novels by Dickens over and over again. And after that - practically no one. It is a convention of Green's world that nobody bothers much with novels. As John's mother disapprovingly wonders to herself, 'here he was on to his books again, as if books mattered in life' (*Bl*, p.49). The following exchange from *Back* is altogether typical:

"I don't see much in books," Mr Summers said.
"No more do I," Phillips agreed (p.129).

Nor does Rock. *Concluding's* ex-scientist revenges himself on a world which has turned its back on him by himself renouncing the printed word in any form whatsoever ('for some years now, this distinguished man had not opened a single one of the communications he received' (p.33)). His library rots away in a bedroom 'stale, packed with books not one of which he had read in years' (p.5). Green's party-goers simplify matters by having identical furnished apartments, where 'Even what few books there were bore the same titles and these were dummies' (*PG*, p.133)¹⁴.

1.3.3 The writing compulsion

Bridling at Green's attitude, fellow Etonian Arts Society member Anthony Powell accused him of bad faith:

Yorke complains in *Pack My Bag* of having allowed himself to become Secretary of the Arts Society, of which he speaks rather condescendingly; asserting that no one would have bothered with such things, if they had been in a position to make their mark in the school by more conventional paths. This seems not only a kind of ingratitude towards what was a considerable enhancement of school existence, but an attitude altogether surprising in Yorke himself, who throughout life - when he had much else on his plate - toiled away in his spare time at writing novels that were unlikely ever to bring him more than *succès d'estime*. Again the deep split in his feelings is revealed; half a despising of the arts; half a dedicated writer¹⁵.

That Green's attitude and practice do not satisfactorily connect is an altogether

¹⁴ This attitude is a typically ambivalent one: Green, consciously a member of this derided moneyed class, was positively addicted to fiction. Sebastian Yorke points out the paradox: 'he did not discuss writing or books by choice [...] The disinclination to discuss books was somewhat surprising because reading, for which he had a voracious appetite, was his chief recreation and relaxation [...] On average, he must have got through about eight books a week [...] The standard of the novels never seemed to matter' ('A Memoir', p.294). And echoes of this are reflected in his work: for the pastor of Green's first published short story (at Eton, in 1923), novels are 'a means of taking him out of himself' ('Bees', p.3); the diary section of *Blindness*, some three years later, contains a series of over-enthusiastic tributes to prose stylists, culminating in the euphoric tribute: 'What a force books are! [...] like dynamite' (p.34). And, some forty years later, even the melancholic article 'Unloving', published long after Green had ceased to produce novels, admits that books can act as 'a pleasant soporific as one gets older, and one's own heart begins to wither and fade' ('Unloving', p.280).

¹⁵ *To Keep the Ball Rolling: The Memoirs of Anthony Powell, Volume I: Infants of the Spring* (London: Heinemann, 1976), pp.106-7.

typical feature of his work, which embraces fertile paradoxes and unsettling dichotomies. Certainly Green's dedication is as unquestionable as his metaphors for writing ambiguous - the Bluebeard secretly scribbling away in his spare time, the act itself 'alone for oneself [...] like making a break in billiards with all the agony, a sort of *Billiards Televised*'. John Russell, commenting on this statement, suggests that a 'combination of near-indifference to the idea of writing and awareness of pain in the act of writing goes far towards defining Green's attitude to his work. For him, much of the act is sheer burden' ('TII', p.446)¹⁶. Green's characteristic unease about writing is further complicated by the various metaphors of compulsion which he uses to define the act of composition. Writing, in these images, is as unavoidable as any of the manias which grip his characters. *Pack My Bag* oddly confesses that 'I write books but I am not proud of this any more than anyone is of their nails growing' (p.238). Whether you are proud of it or not, writing, apparently, simply cannot be avoided. The analogy is typically odd: writing novels, like any bodily function, is as automatic as living itself, an instinctual and compulsive activity: there is 'no escape, no avoiding the recital' (p.144). When writing, the autobiography suggests, 'everything must go down that one can remember; all one's tool box, one's packet of Wrigley's' (p.12). The idea that writing is a biological imperative which cannot be avoided is a favourite Greenian metaphor. John Haye calls his diary 'a sort of a pipe to draw off the swamp water' (*Bl*, p.3); later comparisons explain the writer's art as 'a way of clearing his bloodstream of the various poisons being pumped by his poor heart' ('Unloving', p.280); or that 'writing is like diarrhea; it pipes off the things that are in a ferment. That's all' ('DL', p.94).

Less physical tropes of displacement can also be found in *Pack My Bag*. Green uses the writing persona as a mask for the self, just as the autobiographical genre is

¹⁶ Green later described how he found writing each novel physically draining: 'I [...] carry it in my head. When I say carry I mean the *proportions* - that is, the length. This is the exhaustion of creating. Towards the end of the book your head is literally bursting' ('AF', p.243). His sensitivity to such strains is equally apparent in his review of Virginia Woolf's *A Writer's Diary*. The piece is at once a consideration of her artistic personality and, in a wider sense, also a reiteration of his own preoccupations. Green swiftly focuses upon 'the strain understandably evident' which 'reaches almost intolerable heights' ('AWD', p.181). Each publication was immediately followed, he notes, by 'the girding of the loins, and the starting of what for her is the new nightmare, the next compulsion, the new book' (p.180). He concludes, 'we believe that, in 1941, a great woman and a great writer died, leaving in her work, as true artists do, a great part of herself behind her so freshly set down with endless, excruciating and exhausting labour' (p.183).

itself an exercise in fictional displacement, a disburdening of spare parts from the past which 'otherwise would be used in novels' (p.5). Green uses rituals and routines to ward off introspection. Writing offers a protective measure or 'form of solitary self-control' (Breit, p.104) which displaces a potentially uncontrollable 'ferment' from man to writer. It conveniently occupies spare time, a means of self-discipline for someone 'too weaknatured to live without routine' (*PMB*, p.213)¹⁷. Despite working a hard forty-eight hour week in the foundry, Green by his account still managed routinely to squeeze in a thousand words of prose every evening after work, averaging 'two and a half hours writing', leaving 'only two hours to fiddle about in' (p.237).

Writing and the persona also offer a series of intriguing displacements of identity. Under the cover of the narrative mask Green figuratively strikes a pre-emptive blow against providence: lest 'his death should be falsely interpreted, he kills himself off beforehand - suiciding the "falsified" self'¹⁸. The autobiography entertains various potential deaths, announcing morbidly that 'most of us are quite ready' (p.235). This brings us back to the anthropological implications of the mask, for Green does in *Pack My Bag* plays out his own ceremonial funerary rite, enacting various scenarios of premature death which offer the *doppelgänger* self, 'Henry Green', in metaphorical exchange for the life of the writer behind the pseudonym. *Pack My Bag* incessantly talks about death, mixing childhood memories from the First World War with morbid fantasies of the next, from the wounded soldiers, 'people meant to die' (p.65) of his childhood, to the present 'light of imminent death, that rather ghastly colour in the sky [...] with the sirens wailing their call of now you may have to die' (p.207)¹⁹. *Pack My Bag* doubles as a self-pitying epitaph: 'surely it would be asking much to pretend one had a chance to live', the opening page plaintively announces; 'we who may not have time to write anything else must now do what we can' (p.5).

¹⁷ Goronwy Rees, noting Green's obsessional habits at University (where Green adopted suitably bizarre daily rituals - 'by not varying my food I was giving my stomach less to do' he explained (*PMB*, p.201)), was to conclude that 'Not many undergraduates, of course, devised quite so bizarre a program for spending their time at Oxford' (*A Chapter of Accidents* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1972), p.66).

¹⁸ Rod Mengham, *The Idiom of the Time: The Writings of Henry Green* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p.63.

¹⁹ 'Before the Great Fire', the only surviving fragment of Green's projected history of the A. F. S., *London and Fire 1939-45*, concludes in similar fashion, its author feeling 'alone, frightened, sickened, sure of dying' ('BGF', p.279).

This obsession with death struck Green's wartime contemporaries as excessive (Walter Allen, indeed, called *Pack My Bag* 'the expression of a death-wish')²⁰. But Green's desire for self-preservation actively requires this. Even his deliberately reduced scope, focusing upon childhood and cutting out more recent events, is a way of blocking 'the ticking of the clock towards death'²¹ at the same time as it preserves the past for the future. For autobiography's great advantage, as Avrom Fleishman notes, is that

each autobiographical utterance embalms the author in his own prose, marking his passage into a form that both surrenders him to death and yet preserves his name, acts, and words²².

And so the autobiographer, in his figurative burial chamber, surrounds himself with exhumed moments from the past, 'things to die with' (*PMB*, p.54). While one can write one writes: like Scheherezade, the teller of tales fills the air with stories to keep death at bay. Ostensibly convinced that he 'may not have time to write anything else', Green composes his last testament by writing himself as a text. According to this process his distant past selves function as decoys for the "real" present self - a process elsewhere compared to a strip-tease. The hunt is on to keep death at bay, as Green's insistent hunting metaphors suggest, and the autobiography offers a variety of examples which suggest how this might be accomplished. Death, the text demonstrates, can be outwitted by language. Following an accident in Mexico a telegram arrives stating that 'both my parents were dying' (p.145), and this is then corroborated in the next morning's newspaper by a 'short paragraph which announced there was no hope for either of my parents' (p.147). These printed accounts, however, are mistaken, as if announcing the worst effectively averts disaster. It offers Green an example showing how to cheat death in print. His parents acknowledge the supernatural aspect of this, and send 'photographs home as a joke' of them with 'bandages swathed around their heads and necks for fun' (p.150). In identical fashion *Pack My Bag* parcels up its author, in Green's own pre-emptive strike against an uncertain future, as sacrificial victim. This is also helped by the fact

²⁰ 'An Artist of the Thirties', *Folios of New Writing* 3 (Spring 1941), pp.149-58 (157).

²¹ Burton Pike, 'Time in Autobiography', *Comparative Literature* 28 (1976), pp.326-42 (335).

²² *Figures of Autobiography: The Language of Self-Writing in Victorian and Modern England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), p.33.

that the autobiography, written by Henry Yorke but published under Henry Green's name, is an autobiography *by another*, written offering the decoy self as sacrifice. This symbolically offers another way of confusing death - which brings us back to those organic metaphors of displacement, in which fiction displaces and diverts disaster much as the body purges itself of toxins.

Another example of displacement comes with the tantalising snippet in *Pack My Bag* casually describing a minor accident which occurred on Green's way back from the south of France. He writes that his friends there had

foretold a railway accident I should be in on the way home. It came to pass but shall find no place here, it was no different from what might have been expected (p.198).

Green does not enlarge on the incident, making no reference to *Blindness*, in which a similar scenario has quite catastrophic consequences. His novel, therefore, in exaggerating this accident, also takes the *threat* of disaster, and transforms it into fiction.

1.4 PACK MY BAG: DECONSTRUCTING AUTOBIOGRAPHY

1.4.1 Autobiography compromised

Pack My Bag takes a decidedly unconventional approach to the autobiographical genre. The primary qualities usually associated with autobiography - clarity, candour, self-examination, discussion of one's emotional life and occupational career - are less than prominent. Green shies away from the explicit: his self-portrayal is more a game of hide-and-seek, and he fails to provide much insight into what Sartre suggests a writer's autobiography should logically discuss: how the author has 'become someone who writes'²³. *Pack My Bag*, for all its apparent candour and disarming interrogatory asides, only permits a highly selective intimacy. Self-exhibition does not come naturally to Green in any form: covering up the self, he suggests, is instinctual. He refers to the 'shrink from mass-nudity I still have, which is in my case

²³ 'An Interview with Sartre', *New York Review of Books*, 26 March 1970, pp.22-31 (30).

the strongest of all instinctual feelings' (p.43): the writer should not undress in front of his public. Nor should he be too open, as his theory of living, in rooms ideally 'bare of possessions' which refuse to 'give any line on what I was like', suggests (p.179). So too must his reading public not be allowed in too close, near enough to fathom the mystery, to get an obvious line on him. When Evelyn Waugh finished *Pack My Bag* he told Green that 'it makes me feel I know (you?) far less well than I did before, which, in a way, I take to be its purpose'. Certainly Waugh's response to the autobiography's opacities, in particular its scope (he privately grumbled that the 'later part, which might have been delicious, was badly scamped'²⁴), is altogether characteristic. For *Pack My Bag*'s hastily-assembled recollections, Green states, are better in novel form, 'or in any other that is not directly personal' (p.5).

That an autobiography should paradoxically desire to be 'not directly personal' is altogether typical of Green's attitude. Certainly, when he resumed work on an autobiographical sequel to *Pack My Bag* (of which only the sketch 'Before the Great Fire' exists) during the 1950s, he completed an intriguing synopsis which declared the text should be 'autobiographical with the least possible use of the first person singular' ('BGF', p.260). The autobiography offers, as Mark Freeman puts it, a 'depersonalization, that allows for a measure of self-expression while at the same time removing the burden of self-disclosure'²⁵. Green, as if following Gertrude Stein's deconstruction of the autobiographical genre in her *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, similarly threatens to unravel his text²⁶.

This autobiography, then, is a makeshift text, a defective autobiography hastily put together using raw materials which would be 'otherwise used in novels'. Green seems to have regarded his autobiography as an act of pillage, wasting potential anecdotes, stories and recollections which would otherwise have been transformed in future novels (material being 'better in that form'). No sooner are the standard introductions over ('I was born...'), for example, than, in an extraordinary opening definition of the autobiographical venture, Green announces his text represents an

²⁴ *The Letters of Evelyn Waugh*, ed. by Mark Amory (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980), pp.144-47.

²⁵ *Rewriting the Self: History, Memory, Narrative* (London: Routledge, 1993), p.116.

²⁶ Which famously concludes: 'About six weeks ago Gertrude Stein said, it does not look to me as if you were ever going to write that autobiography. You know what I am going to do. I am going to write it for you [...] And she has and this is it' (London: Bodley Head, 1933), p.268.

'excuse' made by those 'who may not have enough time to write anything else' (p.5). Writing autobiography, therefore, requires an *excuse*; it is an act which requires qualification. He rhetorically asks himself whether it is 'presumptuous to write about oneself', or 'fair to expect people to be interested if it is boring and hard work to put down and probably so dull to read' (pp.11, 12). Nearing the end of the text, Green wonders that it 'may be unnecessary to be in such a hurry to write this book' (p.209), questioning the value of the autobiographical venture, 'this life I have tried to describe' (p.217).

This refusal to take things for granted covers other aspects of the genre as well. He deliberately refuses to provide the richness of textual detail which most autobiographies offer, instead choosing to highlight the inadequacies of memory (again, a destructive element in a genre entirely dependent on what its author chooses to recall from the past). Despite beginning along traditional autobiographical lines ('my love for my mother is what I first remember'), Green's text is swiftly undermined by his unwillingness to elaborate or pass over conjectured memories as facts. Memories are unreliable and Green's refusal to make them less so produces some memorably tortuous passages:

in those days *they say* [my mother] used to call out, "Gardener, gardener, I'm going to shoot!" [...]

She called him gardener *it is said* but *I know* she called him Poole (p.7);

I say I remember, as it *seems* to me I do (p.8);

it may be that much later they had told me I should have remembered at the age I was then and that their saying this had suggested I did remember (p.8, my emphases).

Green tends to mix hearsay, fact, personal opinion and memories without privileging any one of these competing points of view consistently. This reluctance or strategic refusal to play the autobiographical game affects the remembering process in this text, in which Green states early on that what one does or does not remember is largely irrelevant:

Most people remember very little of when they were small and what small part of this time there is that stays is coloured it is only fair to say, coloured and readjusted until the picture which was there, what does come back, has been over-painted and retouched enough to make it an unreliable account of what used to be. But while this presentation is inaccurate [...] it does gain by what it is not, or, in other words, it does set out what seems to have gone on [...] what one thinks has gone to make one up (pp.7-8).

What one *thinks* has gone to make one up, what *seems* to have gone on: these phrases of uncertainty encapsulate Green's attitude to the autobiographical venture: a contradiction in terms which gains by what it is not, and not, therefore, by what it should be - a highly abstract conception of autobiographical self-analysis. Narratorial evasions and elisions - the very inadequacies and errors of the text - share equal status with the facts themselves. One of *Pack My Bag*'s more unorthodox theories states that 'what one thinks one knows about oneself' is much less important than what others think (in line with Green's subsequent policy, of leaving the 'inkling of what human beings treasure' to be interpreted by the reader (p.128). If only lies 'give the underlying truth away' (p.186), then the reader of *Pack My Bag* should disregard much of what Green, as autobiographer, says about himself. The areas in which autobiography fails or is deficient therefore represent, in a typical Greenian trope, paradoxically its measure of success. And such failings are highlighted throughout the text. In *Pack My Bag* Green takes De Quincey as his autobiographical model, similarly ready to 'mutilate his narrative [...] suppress facts, and [...] mystify explanations'²⁷. Green's claim that the 'threat of war [...] drives one into a last attempt to explain objectively and well' (p.165) is again disingenuous. Out of the bag go details of childhood hunts: 'Riding home after a hard day has been sufficiently described, every fox-hunter brings it in to one of his books' (p.60). Politics get equally short shrift. The Great War is swiftly passed over: 'as is known', Green breezily states, it 'led to inequalities' (p.193). Subjects he considers unpromising, or is unwilling to discuss, are tellingly dismissed as 'common ground and none of my business' (p.194). He delights in such stringent measures: should such deletions make 'a book look blind', Green famously states, 'then that to my mind is no disadvantage' (p.88). This policy creates textual lacunae which are assumed to be beyond analysis or simply left to the reader, areas dismissed as none of his business. What Green brings to autobiography, therefore, is a reflection of his fictional strategies concerning the use of language: anything can be wilfully suppressed or thematically mutilated. We can see this even more strikingly in Green's abandoned autobiographical sequel, which proposed a genuinely startling deletion: omitting the war years altogether and instead inserting the following disclaimer:

²⁷ *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (London: Dent, 1907, edited edn New York: Chelsea House, 1983), p.64.

And now comes the period of the 1939-1945 war, which has been described repeatedly and from as many perspectives and people as it can well be handled from, so I shall say nothing about it ('TII', p.451)

But the central topic which Green fails to say much about is his career as a novelist. He actually promises in *Pack My Bag* to demonstrate how his style 'changed as a girl's complexion changes with the hours she keeps' (p.166). Yet while he claims that establishing this is vital (the very 'success or failure of this part of my book' depending on it), this is not what he succeeds in doing. None of the quoted prose excerpts are properly explained, nor the circumstances behind their composition provided. What Green thinks of their style and approach, quite 'how this self-expression grew and how it altered' (p.166), is left to the reader to decide; *Pack My Bag* merely collates fragments from the archives which fail to show how he developed as a writer (illustrating the conclusion that Green draws at Oxford, perhaps, that literature is not a subject to write essays about). There is, as Roy Pascal suggests of all such evasive autobiographical texts, accordingly an unsatisfactory 'evolution of his mode of vision in terms of his successive engagement with the world'²⁸. By stopping in 1928, moreover, the autobiography deliberately unpacks much of Green's literary career along with the recent past, 'indistinguishable through being so close, too near to put down' (p.236). Green avoids discussing either *Living* (while he talks about his life in the foundry, his strategies for fictioning it are left unexplained) or *Party Going* (the 1930s are left blank in the text); and *Blindness*, unnamed in the text, is only mentioned in passing and never discussed critically.

1.4.2 Autobiographical inauthenticity

But what of the self Green describes? All *Pack My Bag*'s metaphors for writing the self, comparing the autobiographical quest to hunting or fishing, emphasize how like a game of hide and seek remembering is. And his approach generates its own difficulties. Problems of recall directly affect Green's ability to portray himself. *Pack*

²⁸ *Design and Truth in Autobiography* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960), p.135.

My Bag's account of Green's development through childhood to adolescence is marked by distance. His early memories are 'I don't know why, surprisingly few', 'hardly anything at all' (pp.12, 15). The schoolboy Henry Yorke is described as a 'very fat' child, used by his school as 'an advertisement for their cooking'. He is 'examined by inspecting parents', 'thumped and fingered like fat stock at a show' (pp.18-19). This description strikes a similar note to the public presentation: the self as tactile object, a paradoxical 'other' which his biographer regards with distrust as this substitute written self wanders, semi-autonomously, before his bemused gaze. As an autobiographer Green falls into the role of impartial observer, attempting to prod this past self into life on the page. This distance is exacerbated by his inability to reinhabit his past, to recall adequately things twenty or twenty-five years ago and 'so far now' (p.138), when they are buried beneath the 'blanketing which time or distance lends' (p.144).

Later dissociations lead back to the prototypical estrangements of school life. Green and his schoolfellows are, emblematically, 'almost prisoners from ourselves' (p.21). At Oxford he recalls feeling 'diffident, desperate now, estranged' (p.102). This estrangement is two-way, the news of his brother's death provoking an emotional crisis both in himself at the time, and in the adult writer looking back. He writes:

I remember being frightened. I was not showing enough sorrow [...] I cried because I thought I had to cry, because there had been a disaster and because here I was sitting unfeeling in this school holy of holies, all alone (p.80).

This section is revealing: Green the autobiographer is frightened by his apparent lack of capacity for genuine emotion, his inability to express or feel what he thinks he should be feeling. *Pack My Bag* is obsessed with intangible things: the emotions and secrets of grown-up life which cannot be accessed by children on the one hand; the inability of the grown-up writer to access his childhood feelings on the other. After the funeral he feels as if a 'plate-glass window' has cut him off from his fellow pupils. Bereavement sets one apart: 'any boy was made strange to us, he was set apart by the occurrence as though he had turned overnight into an albino' (p.81). With the reported death of his parents, the same situation recurs:

I felt absolutely nothing at all. [...] A shock blankets the mind [...] in this case the shock made the sensation of grief, which I am not sure I have ever felt, altogether out of the question. Instantly, and I fear this is horrible, I began to dramatize the shock I knew I had had into what I thought it ought to feel like (p.145).

In both passages an excessive use of the first person marks not an egotistic confirmation of the personality, but instead a note of desperation at the weakness of a self which eludes both the writer remembering and the self experiencing. This emotionally inadequate self is condemned by his autobiographer for being unable to react properly to the situation. Such dissociation is altogether typical of an autobiography preoccupied with such feelings of inauthenticity and hypocrisy. At Eton Green relates a 'discreditable scene' concerning 'a boy, sufficiently unpopular [...] whose friend I was supposed to be' (p.84): these memories seem faintly comical, like reading about the experiences of someone else. The entire situation, he concludes with distinct lack of confidence, 'must have been absurd'. Elsewhere he speculates 'how terrible we *must have* been' (p.29), or that 'we *may have* revolted against fear but it is *more likely* we thought ...' (p.104, my emphases). An inability to reinhabit past events is instead replaced by speculative conclusions drawn by a stranger commenting on his past. 'How unattractive is one now, and was one more or less so then?', he wonders (p.12). Faced with apparently disharmonious versions of oneself, bewilderment seems the most appropriate response. Had the younger Yorke been praised more at school, his later self neurotically fears, the end result might well have been an even greater diminishment: he might be 'even less of a person now' (p.112). It is a time of garish paintings and outrageous garments, in which a horse's sunbonnet displayed to shock represents to him now 'the extent of my emancipation at that time' (p.110). The furor surrounding this affair is described as occurring due to 'exhibitionism no doubt' (p.116). Green's tone is, once more, of dispassionate commentary on oneself *as another*, as if carefully examining a faded photograph or still-life tableau. In all such examples looking at this highly 'negligible personality' (p.113) writing effectively externalizes the internal.

1.4.3 Estrangement and the autobiographical first person

Green's sense of estrangement is an inevitable side-effect of the autobiographical genre, which, as Louis Renza notes, necessarily 'entails a split intentionality: the "I" becoming a "he"'. The writer of an autobiography, then, is at once subject and object combined, a split 'peculiar to the autobiographical task'²⁹. An autobiographer thus occupies a peculiar textual position, simultaneously unable to see events in their true perspective, yet at the same time embedded at their centre - a writing 'I' analysing a quite separate acting 'I'. As Green discovers, the self which expresses can never be one with the past self described. Glimpses of the compositional present abandon the pretence that each written 'I' refers to past selves - what Emile Benveniste defines as 'the linguistic instance 'I'' has, in autobiography, to serve several possible speakers³⁰. There is the self in the past, as well as the writing self who occasionally intervenes, directly referring to things in the present: 'As I write' (pp.54, 162), or 'Analysing now' (p.97). Nearing the end Green adds some very specific spatio-temporal references:

As I write this at the Beach, which is a swimming-pool open to the sky at Monte Carlo (p.226);
On the 26th we leave Monte Carlo because I have a Board Meeting in London on the 28th (p.232).

The effect of this is, in *Pack My Bag*, highly schizophrenic. In trying to ascertain what has 'gone to make oneself up' Henry Yorke, suffering from adolescent paranoia, remembers how he 'played the detective' at school (p.129); Henry Green's *Pack My Bag* in turn investigates the nature and life of Henry Yorke. Estrangement is unavoidable, either between the 'eye' that sees and the 'I' that writes, or between writer and persona, or present self and past selves. The autobiography is heavy with the horrors of a childhood of spying and feeling spied upon - a very 1930s attitude, of course, in these edgy inter-war years, the heyday of international thrillers, detective stories, and the socio-analytical movement 'Mass Observation' (its stated aim 'the observation of everyone by everyone, including themselves')³¹. Green's diary entries

²⁹ 'The Veto of the Imagination', *NLH* 9 (1977-78), pp.1-26 (9, 10).

³⁰ *Problems in General Linguistics*, trans. by Mary Elizabeth Meek (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1971), p.218.

³¹ Mass Observation 'Fact' Pamphlet, 1937, quoted in Robert Graves and Alan Hodge, *The Long Week-End: A Social History of Great Britain 1918-1939* (London: Faber and Faber, 1940), p.402. M. O. indeed noted that 'the detective has become a figure of popular admiration: his is a profession which calls for a scientific analysis of human motives and behaviour' (quoted in Cunningham, p.334).

preserve 'exactly that sensation of being watched' (p.112) and, gripped by paranoid 'delusions of persecution' (p.136), he spies on his friends, ensuring that 'I could keep my eye on what I now felt was their escape and my dwindling security'. 'I began not to feel safe', he adds (p.133).

Such splits are further complicated by the 'Henry Green' persona. For Green's text is authorized by that pseudonymous name on the cover, that person *with another name*. An author's proper name Foucault defines as 'the principle of a certain unity of writing', a 'nucleus of expression' around which opinions and preconceptions of that writer cluster (he calls this the 'classificatory function')³². *Pack My Bag*, the autobiography of Henry Yorke attributed to another (the name on the cover, 'Henry Green'), confronts such unities in a variety of ways. As Todorov declares, the

author is unnameable: if we want to give him a name, he leaves us the name but is not to be discovered behind it; he takes eternal refuge in anonymity³³.

Henry Green's autobiography is most reluctant to discuss what Henry Green is famous for, and instead narrates the (somewhat misremembered) childhood of Henry Yorke: the latter is scarcely to be found beneath the name of his novel-writing alter ego. Crucially, this autobiography indeed makes no reference either to the "real" name of its subject, or explains that 'Green' is a pseudonym, therefore undermining what modern autobiographical theory, following Philippe Lejeune, terms the 'autobiographical pact' between writer and reader - that the name on the cover functions as a promise of truthfulness, a personal sanctioning of the text's contents³⁴. Not so in *Pack My Bag*, however, which repeatedly questions whether autobiographical truth can actually exist, given the dangers of fictioning the self (Green indeed later reclassified *Pack My Bag* with *Blindness*, as 'mostly autobiographical' texts 'not necessarily accurate as a portrait' of the self ('AF', p.238)). His autobiography repeatedly refers to the activity of 'telling stories', which are ways of self-fictionalization - a process already advanced in Green's case, where

³² 'What Is an Author?', *Partisan Review* 42 (1975), pp.603-14 (606-10).

³³ Tzvetan Todorov, *Introduction to Poetics*, trans. by Richard Howard (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1981), p.39.

³⁴ 'Autobiography in the Third Person', *NLH* 9 (1977-78), pp.27-50.

the autobiographer's name is itself a fictional construct, its readability sabotaged³⁵.

Such difficulties are a characteristic feature of *Pack My Bag*, which elsewhere talks of being 'in a difficulty with names'. He refuses to name Eton, referring instead to 'the public school I went to' (*Blindness*, similarly, oddly transforms it, in another pseudonymous gesture, into 'Noat'); and he deletes as many names as possible from the text (the 'best way, and that which comes nearest to my style of living, is not to mention names at all' (p.87)) - for *names*, he alleges, 'distract'. So his childhood friends accordingly disappear beneath the collective first person plural, neither named nor differentiated, denied the chance to appear *as themselves* (neither, apparently, have the 'desire to be recognised by comparative strangers'). Demonstratives instead suffice, so that the text refers, awkwardly, to 'That friend' or 'that club' (p.216). Instead of including disguised self-portraits (as in, say, Isherwood's pseudo-autobiographical novel, *Lions and Shadows*), Green avoids being specific: just as, of course, he fails to illuminate his own pronominal ambiguities.

1.4.4 'The avoidance of intimacy in important things': autobiographical conclusions

In a crucial passage *Pack My Bag* likens conversation, in the troubled days of 1938, to

a kind of strip-tease with rapidly changing, always fewer and ever more diaphanous clothes; in this way, in such places anyone can divest himself of one more protective covering and in exchange turn over another's discarded skin cast between his hands (p.186).

Green's organic metaphor sees the self, therefore, in terms of change and flux; the lines of 'identity' redrawn as a complex system of layers and coverings. These, as in *Blindness*'s chrysalis-to-butterfly structure, suggest that the self, in a perpetual process of reinvention, is like a palimpsest, simply sloughing away surplus,

³⁵ Isherwood implies much the same: *Lions and Shadows* promises disarmingly to tell of 'A young man living at a certain period in a certain European country [...] *That the young man happens to be myself is only of secondary importance*: in making observations of this sort, everyone must be his own guinea-pig' (*Lions and Shadows: An Education in the Twenties* (London: Hogarth Press, 1938), p.7, my emphases).

redundant self-images like, perhaps, Pound's cast-off masks. All of Green's narrations, as chapter three's discussion of voice and attribution aims to prove, are similarly protean, for a writer's idioms must accordingly 'alter in order to sharpen the reader's attention, and also to be oneself' ('SG', p.8). The novelist, Green elsewhere declared, 'must always be changing his own style so as not to be trapped by the clichés which he is continually creating for himself' ('ENF', p.23). One cannot be *oneself* without being, necessarily, strangely protean (*someone else*) - as the alternation between 'Green' and Yorke, the fiction's troubled doubles and the obliquely rewritten, unflattering 'self-portraits' in the fiction, considered in section 1.5.5, will illustrate. The instability of the self grounds the unstable vision. Green's own wartime formulation of this - the writer's need to flexibly express the 'idiom of the time' ('Apologia', p.94) - is a highly emblematic phrase for his chameleon-like fiction, in which the writing self is constantly reinvented. The past selves in *Pack My Bag* are forever undermining continuity between past and present, and whenever Green peers behind their outward appearance, it is only to discover that beneath the mask lies not the true self but simply more masks. Barthes wrote in his equally idiosyncratic autobiography that

anyone who speaks about himself gets lost - the image repertoire is taken over by several masks (*personae*), distributed according to the depth of the stage (and yet *no one* - *personne*, as we say in French - is behind them)³⁶.

Green similarly imagines identity to be little more than a series of 'protective coverings', decoys for the self or masks which conceal a core which is beyond analysis - 'a gap where a personality should exist', Michael North suggests³⁷. Green rewrites the autobiographical venture, turning 'self-analysis' into a strip-tease which peels off surplus layers of personality. The 'Green' persona, as we have seen, is the prototypical example of this process.

Pack My Bag suggests that the ideal relationship between autobiographer and reader is like 'a long intimacy between strangers with no direct appeal to what both

³⁶ Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes, trans. by Richard Howard (London: Macmillan, 1977), pp.119-20.

³⁷ Henry Green and the Writing of His Generation (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1984), p.36.

may have known' (p.88). Green talks of the need to keep memories 'muted', not interfering with the 'reader's communion with his own' (pp.143-44). A curious strategy indeed in an autobiography intended to be about oneself; yet typical nonetheless of Green's radical retake on the genre, which refuses to accept as straightforward its key element, memory itself. He writes:

it is wrong to try to recreate days that are done. All one can do is search them out and put them down as close as possible to what they now seem [...] enough apart not to be too near what they once meant (p.143).

One should not, Green emphasizes, be 'too near' what really happened. The autobiographical strip-tease depends on the expectation of self-revelation which Green, typically, never fulfils. *Pack My Bag* keeps names, places, topics and ultimately his self-portrayal too deliberately imprecise.

The 'sound so faint' of memories but vaguely recalled, the approval with which Green notes at one point of recollections sufficiently unspecified that 'there is in these chance escapes almost any summer day at any time of life' (p.138), shows how he seeks to destabilize autobiography, devaluing the unique and desiring the universal. He tries to erase memories he considers too personal from his autobiography, and aims instead to write unbounded by associations (p.88). In Green's text the autobiographer constantly disappears, concealed behind these displaced memories which offer a way of erasing the self. The autobiography must, like the novel and life itself, be 'capable of several meanings', and be 'all things to all men, if only because the reaction of each individual reader varies in each case' ('ENF', p.22).

1.5 THE UNSTABLE SELF

1.5.1 The 'constantly divisible' self

Andrew Gibson writes that Green

was inclined to assume that we are never so much ourselves as when exchanging one identity for

another. He distrusted conventional notions and representations of individuality, because he saw individuals as actually constantly divisible (*RND*, p.133).

As an experiment in self-analysis *Pack My Bag* reaches some interesting conclusions. It problematizes the very idea of a settled, stable and continuously developing self, and influences Green's subsequent portrayal of character and identity within the fiction. In his texts, as we shall see, the self is 'constantly divisible': destabilised by misidentification and psychic transference, and swayed by external factors - defined by social structures and the opportunity these offer for role-playing. Identity repeatedly breaks down, and Green's fiction contains numerous characters whose personalities change or disintegrate under stress or in unusual situations. Processes which erase the self - breakdowns, comas, and trances - repeatedly threaten their mental integrity. What is conventionally called 'personality', the novels suggest, might better be described as a series of transient and troublesome positions. The unstable vision tests conventional interpretations of individuality, a concept which has an uncertain and unstable meaning in Green's fictions, where characters and narrators alike articulate each other's languages just as they seem, frequently, articulated by language itself. They play roles, compulsively mimic each other, suffer dizzying transferences of identity, and are misled by strange physical and psychical resemblances. Doubles, significantly, are as widespread as the characters who suffer mental collapses: both are symptomatic of the disintegrating subject in the fiction. Green's protagonists are notably weak, unable to impose themselves on their surroundings: Richard Roe is 'dopey'; Charley Summers 'hopeless'; Charley Raunce indecisive and acquiescing. The individual is characteristically easily absorbed into the mass (itself a distinctly 1930s fascination): *Surviving* lovingly describes geometric 'movements of people' in 'eddies, now and again large curves' or 'slow centrifugal motion' ('TTAL', pp.48-50). The crowds in *Living* and *Party Going* are 'woven tight as any office carpet or [...] the holy Kaaba soon to set out for Mecca' (*PG*, p.150). This is made that much easier by the fact that, in Green's fictional worlds, his characters tend to differ less from each other than might be expected - or, as *Party Going*'s Evelyn puts it,

"If people vary at all then it can only be in the impressions they leave on others' minds, and if their turns of phrase are similar [...] what is it makes them different" (p.145).

In *Back*, a text preoccupied with strange physical and mental resemblances, Nancy emblematically states that “I expect we’re most of us alike, it’s natural after all to consider you’re the only one on earth” (p.70). Charley Summers, deranged in analogy, is so tormented by Nancy’s resemblance to Rose that he asks his secretary:

“what would you say if a woman you’d known most of your days told you she wasn’t herself? Not sick or ill I mean, but another person all at once...” (p.109).

The fear that anyone might suddenly be transformed into ‘another person all at once’ naturally recalls Pye’s similar doubts about the identity of his first lover, asking Richard: “‘ave you taken one person for another?” (Ca, p.157). In Green’s novels, where physical similarities, shared verbal conventions and psychic identifications blur the boundaries of personality, what actually separates one person from another is often a very real concern. Identity, Green suggests, is an increasingly irrelevant concept, tested and found wanting by his autobiography, and progressively destabilized in the fiction.

1.5.2 The self as practice of language

The effect of blindness in Green’s first novel is significant. He uses it to effect a range of perceptual distortions, questioning the connection between words and what they represent, and how this then affects our preconceptions of the self. Without the confirmation of visual images everything seems ‘abstract’ to John Haye in *Blindness*. This so disorients him that he feels that his ‘personality had gone’ (p.83). Green’s point is that ‘personality’ is inextricably bound up with our senses, and linguistic practice in particular. Language, he suggests, contributes to our conception of personality and the ways in which ‘the self’ can be expressed. As Green elsewhere notes, it is

only by an aggregate of words over a period followed by an action, that we obtain, in life, a glimmering of what is going on in someone, or even in ourselves (‘ANR’, p.141).

His autobiography is, as we have seen, indeed an 'aggregate of words', attempting to approach the 'glimmering of what is going on' in himself. This is an observation repeated in his novels and later critical statements, which repeatedly link language and identity: one *is* what one *says*; 'what a man is, also makes the way he writes' ('Apologia', p.92).

Much the same conclusions can be drawn from Green's portrayal of character in the fiction, which typically suggests that people are hollow or insubstantial, and at the mercy of the language which they use. *Blindness*'s protagonist finds life without sight to be curiously empty, 'filled with the echo of people round' (p.80), an auditory world created out of the 'broken ends of conversation' (p.243). Like Schopenhauer, who likened the self to a 'hollow glass globe from the emptiness of which a voice speaks'³⁸, Green imagines the mangled war-veterans in *Pack My Bag* to be hollow, 'so cracked that a shout will set up vibrations enough to shatter' them (p.66). In similar fashion the characters of *Party Going* are compared to hollow, empty vessels, filled by words alone. They do not articulate language so much as it spills uncontrollably out of them. When Julia gets excited she reaches 'that pitch like when a vessel is being filled it gets so full the water spills over' (p.74), while Alex literally brims over with words. He talks volubly,

like a man whose hand trembles trying to pour red wine into a jug, he misses it and that wine falling on the table, shows red no more but is like water (p.229).

Similar images of hollowness recur elsewhere: Angela Crevy's politeness can be turned 'on at will' and pours out 'in the way water will do out of taps' (p.117). Raunce's Albert, similarly, becomes 'unstoppered' when upset (*Lo*, p.153). Like Green's mimics, similarly helpless to control what they say, they too are in this fashion articulated by language. Green therefore articulates through such absences a particularly modernist hollowness.

³⁸ quoted in Vincent P. Pecora, *Self and Form in Modern Narrative* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1989), p.148.

1.5.3 The function of mimicry

Green's characters are skilled mimics, who let language coordinate their speech. They pepper their conversation with borrowed expressions and catch-phrases, which vary from situation to situation. Linguistic habits are a common means of identification. Freely appropriating the dialogue of others, they are the perfect exponents of what Mikhael Bakhtin calls *heteroglossia* - the idea that every text, every utterance contains 'a multiplicity of social voices'³⁹, and that the novel is a system of competing languages (a topic which we shall further examine in chapter three). For Green's characters constantly express '*another's speech in another's language*' (*Dialogic Imagination*, p.324): idiom, the novels suggest, is always relative. Uncertain about their own identities, they compensate by imitating those around them, automatically modifying their behaviour according to their surroundings or social status. In *Caught*, for example, we find Richard slipping 'after a few beers' with the Regulars 'into what he imagined was their way of talking' (p.160). In its most dramatic form the tendency to mimic things produces some spectacular instances of ventriloquy, best illustrated in Green's memorable chameleon figures - the strange detective in *Party Going*, *Loving's* insurance agent, and *Concluding's* Sebastian. All three are pathological mimics, who use language entirely contextually.

The first of these, *Party Going's* 'mystery man', pauses in mid-conversation, 'as though he did not want to speak until he could make up his mind which accent would do his trick best' (p.82). He shifts from one discourse to another, adapting his idiom to each situation. So, 'without any warning' he speaks in

Yorkshire accent where previously he had been speaking in Brummagem. This sudden change did his trick as it had so often before (p.80).

His idiom traverses a baffling array of potential discourses, from Yorkshire to Brummagem to, a bit later, 'educated accents', Brummagem again, before finally speaking 'ordinarily' (p.168). Quite what, in this case, ordinarily might be taken to

³⁹ *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. by Michael Holquist and trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p.263.

mean, however, is open to question. His discourse is multi-voiced, indefinable and threatening; the inconsistency of idiom adding to his mysteriousness. In Green's eyes he represents a hollow signifier, a 'man who might be anybody' (p.204). And this hollowness is threatening, just as the detective's discourse is obscurely tied to death and disease ('as he talked of death his speech relapsed into some dialect of his own' (p.205)). Functions define people in the fiction to such an extent that a character without a clearly defined position is problematic, ambiguously caught between potential categories (detective, poisoner, troublemaker, fixer). The text indeed goes to some length to deny him a name, of course; names as we have seen classify, and to be without a name is to be suspiciously indeterminate.

All discourse, Green's mimics suggest, is essentially double. *Loving's* insurance assessor similarly slips in and out of linguistic disguise. "I'll wager thixpenth you can never gueth my bithneth", he coyly suggests, claiming only to be making "a few enquirieth that'th all" (pp.146, 148). He speaks 'gently as if to ingratiate', 'almost genial', and 'almost friendly' (pp.146-50), but when he senses weakness the feigned lisp disappears and he speaks 'grim, not lisping', 'in menacing fashion' (p.148). Kinalty's servants are themselves compulsive play-actors, and their dialogues tend to consist of borrowed impersonations and quotations 'from another context' (p.58), delivered in anything from a high falsetto to a momentary brogue (pp.33, 31). The effective institutionalization of mimicry in *Loving* ensures that dialogue is being constantly appropriated by each person from another. Edie begins 'to speak just like' Charley (p.219), and everyone impersonates Mrs Welch. The servants recognise and appreciate such imitations, particularly enjoying Mike Mathewson's visit, since his lisp offers a new idiom to ape:

Like a class at school when given the signal to break up they all with one accord burst out lisping [...] In no time their hilarity had grown until each effort was received with shrieks (p.212).

They find their impersonations so enticing that they are physically exhausted by them; after a few minutes the servants, gripped by group hysteria (Bakhtin's *carnival* mood indeed), begin to wear 'a look of agony, or as though they were in a close finish to a race over a hundred yards' (p.213). And so, as in some strange Dionysiac rite, the servants are effectively possessed by language.

Concluding's Sebastian Birt is the most extraordinary of Green's mimics. Sebastian is so compelled to 'do his imitations', his natural voice 'heard so seldom', that his colleagues are not even 'sure to recognise' it (p.97). For Seb is always in a *part* (pp.29, 31, 95). Again, like many of Green's characters, he pitches his borrowed discourses as close as possible to 'what he considered to be the level of the person he addressed' (p.44). His character is defined by impersonations of others; mimicry has altogether displaced the self. Sebastian employs a patchwork of transitory identifications: bizarrely theatrical versions of 'Mr Rock's party manner' (p.100); 'an exact imitation of the sage' (p.101); the 'hearty voice of a junior' (p.189); or the falsetto voice which signals 'another severe imitation of Miss Edge' (p.57). Saussure's assertion that 'language is a garment covered with patches cut from its own cloth'⁴⁰ is graphically fulfilled in Sebastian, whose discourse constitutes a motley accumulation of borrowed phrases, an extraordinary harlequinesque dialogue patched together from other contexts. He is the perfect illustration of the Prufrock archetype, a site where scraps of identity jostle incoherently, a 'character in paralysed fragmentation'⁴¹. As in the figure of *Party Going's* 'mystery man', Green uses Sebastian to explore the idiolectic possibilities of a character completely incapable of maintaining a stable idiom. Seb traverses idiom and gender impartially; and improvises, when momentarily stuck for an appropriate voice, by stealing from past discourses as well, 'pretending to quote Herodotus' (p.38), or hovering between idioms, 'about to break into eighteenth century speech' (p.39). Later he slips strangely into 'what he imagined to be cockney', although this 'he knew only from books' (pp.95, 97). What these frenzied imitations fail to do, however, is alleviate the inner sense of emptiness underlying his manner: Sebastian can be almost anything except what he wants to be. On two separate occasions he imitates the voice and mannerisms 'of the sort of lecturer he was not' (pp.30, 117): even the idiom of his own occupation eludes him. The series of selves borrowed from elsewhere mask his inner emptiness. To speak even briefly 'in his own voice' to Rock requires him to bring, in an interesting phrase, 'himself out of himself' (p.38). His inability to keep

⁴⁰ Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, ed. by Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye, in collaboration with Albert Reidlinger, trans. by Wade Baskin (London: Owen, 1960), p.172.

⁴¹ Dennis Brown, *The Modernist Self in Twentieth-Century English Literature: A Study in Self-Fragmentation* (London: Macmillan, 1989), p.30.

these impersonations under control is symptomatic of the fact that he is, effectively, not in control *of* language but, in a very Saussurian way, instead controlled *by* language, which speaks through him - a very structuralist conclusion, seeing the self as being 'always located at a post through which various kinds of message pass' (Lyotard)⁴². Language, therefore, effectively speaks *through* Sebastian. The shock of discovering Merode jolts him, and he speaks 'unaware that he had been shocked into a clever parody of Edge' (p.56); a little later he lapses into an equally unconscious imitation of 'the manner of his colleague Dakers' (p.61). He even has a 'cracked laugh', symbolising his fragmented personality. As we have seen in *Loving*, mimicry is contagious: Rock, of all people, inadvertently offers a 'horrible mimicry of Miss Edge' (p.172); while, in a particularly vertiginous moment at the Founders' Ball, the arch-imitator is himself 'taken off' by several of the girls.

Role-playing offers another form of social mimicry. *Pack My Bag* documents not a developing self but instead a series of disjointed positions; a self 'contrived largely from outside materials' (North, p.213). The selves Green writes about are distant and unconvincing, and he sees childhood as a purely organic process, which contains in embryonic form all the later uncertainties of identity. Growing-up is described as a time 'before one has any mind at all' (*PMB*, p.22): Green's children are little chameleons; unmoulded and pliant, borrowing their attitudes and opinions from those around them. Green calls this process 'aping one's elders before one was of an age' (p.12). Instinctively impersonating their Headmaster, Green's schoolchildren are 'small mirrors changing in colour to the hues of his moods' (p.29). A child is a *tabula rasa*, borrowing its attitudes from elsewhere. Play-acting is central to Green's autobiographical account of childhood, from the wounded veterans at home ('clerks aping gentlemen' (p.72)), to the Eton adolescents, playing 'at being gentlemen' (p.208), or, in cadets' uniforms, 'playing the amateur at a paid game' (p.159). As Christopher Isherwood similarly reflected of his childhood, 'at least seventy-five per cent of my "personality" consisted in bad imitations of my various friends' (*Lions and Shadows*, p.139). For Green play-acting represents the denial of 'a stable, genuine identity' (North, p.213): even his abandonment of a life of privilege provides only temporary impersonations of a life strange.

⁴² Jean-François Lyotard, *The Post-Modern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p.15.

In Green's work 'personality' is problematic: both autobiography and the fiction assert that identity is a *construct*, always constituted elsewhere - in social roles, within language itself, assembled from various cultural codes, found or borrowed from the expectations of others. Green's characters instinctively identify with other people, or their occupations, conflating their own identities with the aspects of their social roles which offer the refuge of institutionalized codes of conduct. Miss Burch states this clearly in *Loving*, suggesting that if you "take someone out of their position in life [...] you find a different person altogether" (p.34). In *Party Going* Max feels automatically obliged to live up to his own character, to behave according to the social persona that, once constructed, others now expect him to conform to (p.189). Stressed by his new responsibilities, *Loving's* Charley struggles to retain his grip, and twice makes 'threadbare' or 'empty' returns to his 'usual manner' (pp.63, 224). The public face, then, can provide a mask, and this mask can compensate for an absence where the 'self' should be.

The doubts which *Pack My Bag* express seem directly influenced by its context, written on the cusp of war, published one year into it. It juxtaposes the crisis of the subject against the crises of the epoch, a fragmentation of self mirrored in the destructive forces of war. Karl Jaspers wrote around this time that

man to-day has been uprooted, having become aware that he exists in what is but a historically determined and changing situation. It is as if the foundations of being had been shattered⁴³.

Green's growing scepticism of the nature of the self, apparent in *Pack My Bag* and increasingly so in the subsequent fiction, directly parallels and illustrates general philosophical shifts in the perception of the human subject across a variety of disciplines, reaching unmistakably similar conclusions to those steadily suggested by linguistic, psychological and anthropological research. *Pack My Bag* fails to establish a unique or autobiographically continuous self, and this directly affects Green's subsequent representation of personality in the fiction. He tends to represent personality as 'not a truth to be expressed but an expression itself, a fiction' (North, p.12). Green's novels suggest that man can to a certain extent be defined by the

⁴³ *Man in the Modern Age*, trans. by Eden and Cedar Paul (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1933), p.10.

structures of language, as we can see in the unsure control his characters exercise over language, the ways in which it traverses them as much as they control it. Saussure's memorable definition of language as a communal system or 'storehouse filled by the members of a given community', existing in a collectivity of speakers rather than in any individual, is helpful in this context: for Green's representation of identity, self, and linguistic practice in his texts is increasingly proto-structuralist (Saussure, pp.13-14). Claude Lévi-Strauss suggests that the

unconscious ceases to be the ultimate haven of individual peculiarities - the repository of a unique history which makes each of us an irreplaceable being. It is reducible to a function - the symbolic function; which no doubt is specifically human, and which is carried out according to the same laws among all men, and actually corresponds to the aggregate of these laws ⁴⁴.

Lévi-Strauss's reduction of the individual to a mere 'function' is, like his dramatic definition of the human subject as a 'passive crossroads' where 'something happens'⁴⁵, mirrored in Green's analysis of character.

1.5.4 The self as *another*

Green's fiction contains a series of remarkable encounters or misrecognitions which symbolise the *otherness* of the self. In *Pack My Bag* Green, looking at a picture of himself (pp.163-64), adopts a markedly confrontational attitude to a self-representation which he feels is 'not in the least like me'. The portrait is a 'resolute pose', a deception which Green amuses himself by imagining others might misinterpret. Dreams of self-substitution by some mysterious other recur in the early fiction, as two previously unpublished short stories in *Surviving* can now reveal. The first of these encounters ('Adventure in a Room', 1923) takes place as a dream, as the story's blind protagonist imagines a painted self-portrait on the wall:

⁴⁴ quoted in John P. Muller and William J. Richardson, *Lacan and Language: A Reader's Guide to Ecrits* (New York: International Universities Press, 1982), pp.9 & 7.

⁴⁵ *Myth and Meaning* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), p.5. Green is himself fond of crossroads (he repeatedly uses the Oedipus motif in his novels, that most prototypical of literary crossroads); *Pack My Bag* being particularly fond of reiterating tropes of self-division (the writer as tightrope walker, balancing between contrary positions, the split between past and present, and so on).

It was a portrait, just a head and shoulders [...] And now it was saying, vacuously, "I am empty nothing, empty nothing, empty nothing, empty nothing... nothing" (p.10).

This dream of a hollow self, which anticipates *Party Going*'s 'empty receptacle' comparisons, enacts a highly symbolic confrontation between the self and its mirror image. Coming up against this representation of the self-as-other, Green's protagonist feels disorientated: his sense of self starts to crumble; and he imagines that he has 'lost all sense of personality [...] just a pair of ears and a brain, absorbent as a sponge' (p.11). This self-image, like Green's encounter with his photograph at Eton, reintroduces the vertigo of misrecognition earlier experienced when he looks into the mirror to see 'a face he knew not [...] It was his own face reflected in the glass, and he did not realise it till afterwards' (p.10).

The second short story, 'Arcady' (1925), describes a night out. It climaxes with another intriguing situation when its first-person narrator hypothetically imagines that he and his date have been

substitutes for each other, so that her young man was not myself but someone else [...] while I began to know that it was not her at any rate sitting opposite me, but someone else perhaps (p.26).

Green's protagonist idly daydreams of an unexpected transformation, an exchange of identity - or 'adventure', as the text puts it. In this fleeting moment Green's ill-matched pair become substitutes for the other, deputising 'for each other's dream' (p.27). This split second of becoming, in a tellingly repeated phrase, *someone else*, a substitute self, is highly emblematic, apparent both in the multiple selves which *Pack My Bag* uncovers and, as we shall see, in Green's obsessive use of doubles and double motifs in these novels so astonishingly rich in situations of confrontation and identification, uneasy meetings between people, intense moments of identification or mimicry, and unexpected encounters with mirror images. Green's texts typically locate identity beyond the subject - in language, cultural roles, or identifications with others.

Surviving's sketches anticipate the most celebrated and emblematic encounter of Green's fiction, Amabel's bath in *Party Going*:

The walls were made of looking-glass, and were clouded over with steam; from them her body was reflected in a faint pink mass. She leaned over and traced her name Amabel in that steam and that

pink mass loomed up to meet her in the flesh and looked through bright at her through the letters of her name [...] She rubbed with the palm of her hand, and now she could see all her face [...] when she looked at herself it was as though the two of them would never meet again, it was to bid farewell (pp.171-72).

This scene provides a prototypical instance of identification: Amabel meets her mirror image in the bathroom's looking-glass and, in an acutely solipsistic moment, identifies with the reflection. Her sanctioning of this pictured double as an authorized self-representation is completed when she baptises it by tracing the letters of her name on the steamy surface of the mirror. This narcissistic use of the proper name both confers approval on the reflection and emphasises how effortlessly Amabel conflates her identity with its written form. She is, in a very Saussurean sense, constituted in language; her fame quite literally this image ('like some beauty spot in Wales') which has been 'sanctified [...] by constant printed references' (p.145). These have turned her into a public icon, the darling of society gossip columnists:

shop girls in Northern England knew her name and what she looked like from photographs in illustrated weekly papers, in Hyderabad the colony knew the colour of her walls (p.140).

She is inscribed within culture, and her written fame provides her with a self-image to identify with.

This encounter is also, specifically, a meeting with a double. Green's narrator refers, in this scene, to 'the two of them', capturing the disorientation of being subject and object combined. Parallels with Lacan's 'mirror-stage' parable are inescapable. Like Green, Lacan denies the possibility of an *a priori* self. The human subject, he instead argues, initially evolves by observing others, as is apparent in the ways that children tend automatically to identify with those around them (they are, in *Pack My Bag*'s phrase, 'little mirrors'). Lacan's theoretical mirror-stage takes this gradual process and enacts it in symbolic form, locating the ego's formation in a hypothetical first encounter with a mirror-image or reflected "other". This is, he suggests, '*an identification*, in the full sense that analysis gives to the term', a narcissistic 'transformation' with the reflected image which forms the subsequent basis for the structuring of the self. At the heart of Lacan's parable or 'symbolic matrix' is the concept that the ego or the self is actually born and sustained as the idea of another, which makes the 'self' a basic misidentification, 'whose

predestination to this phase effect is sufficiently indicated, in analytic theory, of the ancient term *imago*'⁴⁶. In similar fashion Amabel expresses her approval, her desire for this reflected other by first attempting to embrace it, and then baptising the reflection with her name. For it is 'plain' that she 'loved her own shape and skin'. When she finally emerges from her bath it is to recreate herself, 'as if she was moulding something':

Her bath-towel was huge and she slowly rubbed every inch of herself with it as though she were polishing. She was gradually changing colour, where she was dry was going back to white [...] She was polishing her shoulders now and her neck was paling from red into pink and then suddenly it would go white (p.172).

Amabel too is figuratively reborn as another: she 'moulds' herself and changes colour, like the chameleon she is, this recasting all the while structured by the mirror's gaze.

Similar encounters with mirrors occur elsewhere in the fiction. In an equally solipsistic moment in *Party Going* Angela Crevy and Robin Adams make up after a quarrel surrounded by mirrors. As in 'Arcady', their personal drama seems symbolically enacted in these doubling reflections. When Robin looks 'into the glass to see himself' kissing her he is surprised in this by Angela who sees this 'in the mirror she had been watching his back in' (p.128). The visually-refracted moment provides another vertiginous moment of recognition: their physical actions require this independent confirmation, the concrete act of seeing these actions mirrored. Mirrored images also confirm one's sense of self, and it is notable how several of Green's characters see mirrors or windows as offering irresistible opportunities for self-inscription. Joining Amabel's baptism of her reflection on the steamy bathroom mirror are *Back's* Dot Pitter, idly tracing her name on a leaded window (p.123), and Liz Rock from *Concluding*, who unconsciously begins 'to write her name on window glass with a forefinger that left no trace' (the evanescence of the inscription matching her unstable mental condition (p.116)). And then there are the repeated instances of refraction throughout the fiction - the chandeliers which fragment Kate and Edie dancing into millions of component tiny Kates and Edies in *Loving*; the pivotal hotel-party scene in *Nothing* held in a hall of mirrors.

⁴⁶ *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock Publications, 1977), p.2.

1.5.5 Doubles in the fiction

I assumed a double part, and cried
And heard another's voice cry: "What! are *you* here?"
Although we were not. I was still the same,
Knowing myself yet being someone other (Eliot, *Little Gidding*⁴⁷)

Eliot's 'double part' reprises the Prufrockian doubleness of 'you and I'. The potential duality of the self is as common a trope of the epoch's literature - Auden's *The Double Man* (1941), or Plomer's autobiographical *Double Lives* (1943) offer particularly representative titles - as it is in Green's fiction (one of the wartime short stories, 'Mr Jonas', similarly alludes to that double-headed God, patron of split-intentions). Green himself, so drawn to dichotomies and doubleness, always felt that he was living 'in a double world' ('SG', p.8), and feeling divided between things - separate identities, narrator and subject, the 'two lives with two sets of values' of school (*PMB*, p.69), or the adult life split between writing and business - is an important theme of the autobiography, which conveys a quite 'overpowering sense of being divided in two' (Powell, p.198). Such dichotomies unsurprisingly also preoccupy the novels. Psychological processes of identification, particularly obscure or inexplicable ones, fascinate Green, and he writes repeatedly of mysterious pairings or affinities, chance similarities, obscure resemblances, mistaken identities, arbitrary connections and psychic links. This fascination with division and the problems of identity is most dramatically illustrated in the problematic doubles, or *doppelgänger* figures, doubles which allegorize Green's own inner divisions.

Green's use of double motifs in his novels is complex. Reasons for their inclusion remain tantalizingly unexplained; for he teases the reader with obvious connections and strange parallels without, as usual, directly specifying what conclusions, if any, are meant to be drawn from them. In *Blindness* a protagonist called John dates a girl called Joan who he then calls 'June', a blurred linguistic triangle further complicated by a series of strange physical parallels established between the two of them⁴⁸. What

⁴⁷ *Little Gidding* (London: Faber and Faber, 1942), p.10.

⁴⁸ As Mengham notes, 'her face is similarly scarred [...]' and in her case the father is a direct punitive

the renaming or the curious Oedipal connections signify is unclear, although the connections with Green's own mutations of name are unavoidable (a subject we shall return to in section 1.5.7).

To look into a mirror is also to see a double. Lacan writes of the importance of the 'mirror apparatus in the appearances of the *double*, in which psychical realities [...] are manifested' (*Ecrits*, p.3). And to see a double is to see oneself mirrored in another. *Living* contains two crucial encounters along these lines, one a misrecognition, and the other an identification. In the first of these Bert is mistaken by a fellow passenger for an acquaintance: 'This man said Pinks had a double in him then, they might be twin brothers for all you could tell the difference between them' (p.215). The encounter suitably unnerves the already jumpy eloping couple. However, when shortly afterwards Lily looks out of the window to notice a girl whose 'clothes were so much exactly what she liked that [...] it might have been her twin' (p.219), her identification serves a quite different purpose. Bert's double is uncanny; but Lily's is a projection of her own inner values, a visual statement of the life of stability and conformity that she craves. While these two doubles serve quite different purposes, what they share is a feeling that anyone can potentially be duplicated - a central theme, as we shall see, in the fiction.

The war fiction contains Green's most spectacular cases of doubling. He uses the war, that time when 'everything is cracking-up', as a symbol of fracture, pressurizing the characters in his novels. *Caught* and *Back* obsessively play with double motifs, dissociative states and collapses of identity, from the neurasthenic characters who 'forget' themselves and descend into madness, to the bizarre double pairings in both texts. *Loving*, moreover, has a real *doppelgänger*. Mrs Welch and Mrs Tennant argue about different Alberts; characters repeatedly ask "'Which Albert, yours or mine?'" "'Which Albert is it?'" (pp.155, 176). Mrs Welch's Albert, like any *doppelgänger* from Romantic fiction, has his own double life of feigned public obedience and private criminality (as the narrator wryly suggests, after he has been sent to bed one evening, 'By this time he was probably running naked on the steeply sloping roofs high up' (p.207)). Charley calls him a fiend "'straight up from hell'" (p.174); his namesake, Raunce's pantry-boy, is by contrast remarkably law-abiding. The two

agent [...] The Oedipal lameness is transformed into the birthmark on her leg' (p.8).

Alberts are contrasting aspects of each other (Mrs Welch's Albert is, significantly, referred to throughout the text as the other Albert (p.166)): Raunce's Albert even takes the blame for the theft of Mrs Tennant's ring stolen by his criminal alter-ego.

Green's doubles, as this one incident suggests, are always bound in peculiar ways to each other. The prime example of this is the nightmarishly symbiotic relationship which develops between *Caught*'s two principal protagonists, Richard Roe and Pye. There is, first of all, the obvious thematic pun: Pye + Roe = Pyro, in a text about firefighting. The queer correspondance between the two is, however, altogether more entangled than a simple blurring of names (as indeed we have seen in *Blindness*). This begins with the abduction, for Richard feels that it is 'disastrous that the woman who took the boy away should be his Fireman Instructor's sister' (p.11). This is doubly so when he is then assigned to the sub-station, again under Pye:

For days after he did not dare to go to the station, telling himself there must be many of the same name in the Brigade, but experienced enough to know that *there was no escape* [...] As he lay in the carriage he gave one short laugh at the thought of how he had tried to *evade the inevitable* so soon (p.18, my emphases).

Richard does not initially imagine 'even for a wild moment that Pye could be his Station Officer' (p.37). But coincidences, as Mrs Frazier states, are usually malign in Green's work: "'Once you start on coincidences why there's no end to those things'" (*Ba*, p.33). The phrase 'no escape' is symptomatic of the fateful connections throughout the text (both Richard and Pye, for instance, also find there is 'no escape' from Piper, who is the architect of Pye's downfall). The abduction binds Pye and Roe together in mutual embarrassment, and lurks, tangentially, behind every topic when both are present. Pye finishes up 'almost every period [...] by a dark reference to his sister's little trouble' (p.20). When the mess-talk approaches dangerous topics he instinctively reacts, 'a flush spreading over his forehead that the rest could put down to ale if they liked, but which Richard knew came from another cause' (p.75). Even during the training lectures Pye is 'careful not to look at Richard' (p.23); while Richard, in turn, remembers how they 'haunted him' (p.24). A telling phrase: like his double, Richard feels 'haunted' by Pye's continued presence - sensing the sheer *uncanniness* of the bond between them. It is important to note the *intensity* of the identification, this mixed attraction and repulsion. While Richard dreads Pye's

monologues (feeling he 'would rather anything than one of Pye's descriptions of the latest girl' (p.158)), he nevertheless instinctively seeks Pye out; just as Pye, against his better judgement, is driven to talk to Richard about precisely those things he does not want to discuss.

Throughout Green contrasts and compares their responses. In the aftermath of mobilisation, we find Pye 'preoccupied by his past, revitalised in a way that took him by surprise', while Richard, similarly, finds himself 'increasingly absorbed by what was left to him' (p.63). Just as he is unable to 'leave his wife's memory alone' (p.33), Pye cannot banish unwelcome memories of his sister. Pye's mood, before his first visit to the asylum to see Amy, is deliberately likened to an earlier report of Richard thinking about the abduction by Pye's sister as he travels back from his first visit home to see Christopher ('Lying along his bed he groaned as Richard would, full length on the railway carriage seat coming back from his first leave, in six weeks, time' (p.85)). It is inevitable, when Dy and Christopher visit Richard at the fire station on what is supposed to be Pye's day off, that they all come nevertheless face to face together, so that the 'situation Richard hoped would always be spared them was present' (p.147).

These encounters reveal the potential awkwardness of the double: their mutual identification persists, despite the apparently antithetical nature of the pairing, and inevitably worsens in the claustrophobic pressure-cooker atmosphere of the fire-station. The figurative competition between them over Christopher (Pye's sister having sought to steal him from Richard's sister) creates a strange air of rivalry which is complicated when Richard, having decided that he stands no chance with either of the two girls in the nearby flat, tells Pye about Prudence. This he explains to himself as a simple act of currying favour, to 'do himself a bit of good with the Skipper' (p.51). However, it permits a fascinating displacement of illicit desire in which Richard's desire is, symbolically, mirrored in the other, as Pye acts as a proxy lover. The pattern of mixed aversion and compulsion continues, especially marked by the painful conversations which, despite constant misunderstandings, they are strangely unable to avoid.

Both men face climactic traumas, although these have quite different outcomes: Pye undergoes a mental collapse just before the Blitz and commits suicide; Richard, also suffering some form of breakdown ('nervous debility') during the Blitz, emerges

from it damaged but 'superficially uninjured' (p.172). When Richard tries to explain his initial reactions to the Blitz to Dy, the first comparison which springs to mind is his discovery of Pye's corpse: "we were suddenly face to face with it, as I was with Pye two months before when I pulled him out of the gas oven" (p.183). The typically fateful coincidence does not conceal the sheer oddity of this analogy, comparing the Blitz to a coming *face to face* with the 'other' represented by Pye.

Richard's account of Pye's death is cathartic. As he tells the unsympathetic Dy about Pye's suicide, he suddenly realizes that he

could not look at her. He knew, if he did, that it would break down, that he would not be able to go on, that Pye would be nothing; because he now knew the whole experience was almost over (p.194).

The fear that he might not do justice to Pye; that, crucially, Pye *might be nothing*, reveals the depth of identification with this other. Just as his narrative appears to be losing its momentum things come to a head when Dy accidentally asks, "what's the meaning of it all?". Richard then irrationally replies, 'in what, to him, was direct answer, "you've always been most unfair to Pye. [...] That's the tragedy"' (p.194). This is, of course, a far from rational accusation. He starts bizarrely identifying with Pye: first talking in an uncharacteristic 'new high, cracked voice', and then schizophrenically voicing the other man's obsessions. He tells Dy that "a man can be responsible, somehow, for his wife, can't he, but never for his sister, never [...] why should he pay for her?" (pp.194-95). Having previously been 'unfaithful' to Pye, he now mentally sides with his lost double.

Pye, in an equally inexplicable case of identification, wanders into the chiaroscuro-lit night as a direct result of 'worrying about his sister', and, duplicating Amy's abduction of Christopher, picks up a stray child himself and takes him back to the station with him (p.167). This identification he is even semi-conscious of, for when the child confesses he is lost he automatically starts 'thinking of Christopher' (p.169).

The death or disappearance of one half of a doubled pair is continued in *Concluding*. Of the two girls who go missing, only one is recovered. As in *Caught*, where Richard feels obscurely loyal to Pye, Merode refuses to disclose any details about Mary's whereabouts. What is discovered is a worrying parodic double of the

missing girl, a

rabbity Rag Doll dressed gaily in miniature Institute pyjamas, painted with a grotesque caricature of Mary's features on its own flat face (p.140).

Green draws once again on the supernatural aspects of the double: this caricature with its 'flat, white, miniature, flannel face of Mary' (p.145) is unsettling, for, like a make-believe corpse, the doll seems almost to have mysteriously drained the life out of Mary.

In *Back* it proves true that "there's nothing to the shape of a face" (p.128). Obscure physical resemblances and bizarre symbiotic correspondences run riot, in a novel obsessed with instances of doubling, strange resemblances, coincidences, parallels and misreadings. Nancy is Rose's half-sister, and bears a certain physical resemblance to her. Charley misidentifies her as Rose (although James, Rose's ex-husband, professes to find them not at all alike). Charley's conflation of the living Nancy and the dead Rose, is mirrored by Mrs Grant's mistaking Charley for her dead brother John. Then there are the text's narratives about mistaken identity. Mrs Frazier concludes her story about confused identities with the triumphant punch line, "it's the same person [...] they were as like as two peas" (p.34). Her tale in turn anticipates the 'Souvenir', an inserted memoir which narrates the peculiar history of 'two men who were *entirely different* and yet at the same time *exactly similar*', so much so that its heroine, Septimanie, manages to 'fuse the memory of these two men into one, into one true lover' (p.104, my emphases). It too deals with dichotomies, 'the living and the dead', concerning 'the brilliant Count de Gisors, and an obscure young man', who is, tellingly, described as 'his double' (pp.104, 97). In the case of both Charley and Septimanie's doubles, it is the physical similarity which prompts the mental identifications, even though the characteristics of these doubles appear quite different.

The 'Souvenir's' theme is again schizophrenic, another illustration of the idea that two can indeed become one: a bizarre cautionary account of doubles and the danger they pose, which deliberately anticipates the final pairing of Charley and Nancy. In Green's fiction characters can be unique yet simultaneously interchangeable. Nancy feels that while "everyone has their own life" she, on the other hand, "has two, my

own and someone else's'" (p.72). She tells Charley that she feels as a result like

"a sort of walking memory to other people [...] I've had people stop me in the streets [...] I suppose I've a double somewhere in this town all right" (pp.75, 51).

Nancy proves to be, in her own way, just as preoccupied with Rose, whom she indeed calls her 'double', as Charley is. Nancy is both drawn and repelled by the double motif: although she initially protests at this misidentification (claiming it is "not very nice having a double, practically a half twin if you like" (p.70)), she later confesses to being 'intensely proud of the terrible likeness to her late half sister' (p.90). This revelation of the potential *attractiveness* of the double changes her life: she leaves her London flat to help nurse Mr Grant at Redham, and starts to call Mrs Grant 'mother'. She symbolically exchanges her own life and family for that of Rose, and her effective assumption of the place of her dead double in turn prepares her to accept Charley's love for her as an ersatz Rose, to the extent that she eventually acquiesces in his misidentification of her ('she knew what she had taken on. It was no more or less, really, than she had expected' (p.208)).

Charley's reaction to this doubling resemblance is dramatic. As soon as he sees Nancy he pitches

forward, in a *dead* faint, because there she stood *alive*, so close that he could touch, and breathing, the *dead spit*, the *living image*, herself, Rose in person (p.47, my emphases).

The living/ dead dichotomy (indeed, the phrase 'dead spit' recurs on p.71) emphasizes Charley's stupefaction at this manifestation of the double: coming face to face with Nancy, he collapses in sheer shock. Her refusal to recognise him, accordingly, provokes a serious mental crisis ('she had denied him, and it was doing him in' (p.56)). As in the 'Souvenir', the dead lover seems supernaturally reborn in the living, a mysterious resemblance which triumphs over death. Charley believes he can rediscover the dead Rose in the living Nancy, a metaphysical cheating of death, or fusing of two into one which, inevitably, brings us back to *Pack My Bag*'s own evasions of mortality (the functioning of the persona as a strip-tease of masks; the hypothetical elimination of a "decoy" writing self; the bandages which cheat death in his parents' Mexican car-crash). In Green's work doubles offer means of self-

protection, a way of sacrificing part of the self to ensure its survival. In *Caught* Richard feels a sense of obscure loss for his double, even slightly guilty that he himself has survived while Pye has been “sacrificed” (*Pack My Bag* articulates a comparable sense of shock at his brother Philip’s death); Mary and Merode disappear and only the latter emerges alive.

Back contains many other symbiotic connections. Charley’s preoccupation with Rose, like Richard Roe’s with Pye, is a psychic link which he must come to terms with. Rose also links Charley and James; the latter tells Charley that “‘now she’s gone, you’re my link with her’” (p.128). James feels significantly ‘as though Charley and he had shared Rose’ (p.126); a situation curiously mirrored in the erotic confusions of the Bank Holiday weekend, when Charley ends up sharing his date Dot with James (a triangular relationship which repeats Richard’s setting up Pye with Prudence). Middlewitch, a fellow-amputee Charley meets in the artificial limb fitting centre (“‘companions in arms and legs’”, as he puts it (p.22)), is another teasing double, rivalling Charley in a variety of matters (social integration, sexual prowess, successful adaptation to the England they have both returned to). He even turns out to be an ex-boyfriend of Nancy’s. According to him there is also someone called ‘Charley Rose’, a curious compound (recalling the suggested ‘Pye+Roe’ bond) which welds Charley and Rose into one name, just as Charley ends up with Nancy, Rose’s double, in reality.

1.5.6 Psychic crises

Green’s characters, so typically uncertain about themselves, tend to be unusually prone to psychic crises, like mental imbalances, schizophrenic states, and strange cases of transference. This is particularly apparent in *Back*, in which not only is the protagonist psychotic, but numerous other members of the cast suffer from mysterious psychosomatic crises. Illness strangely transfers between the Grants: the amnesiac Mrs Grant recovers her wits just as her previously well husband abruptly falls into a coma (although, like Charley, her mental state remains precarious), just as Charley’s insecurity and Middlewitch’s confidence also mysteriously reverse during the course of the novel. In Green’s work the self is frequently threatened by such

dangers, and the physical collapses or breakdowns which run through the fiction are paralleled by curious verbal disintegrations. Like Beckett, Green uses physical deterioration symbolically, the inclusion of physically or mentally impaired characters in his case reflecting his interest in the mind's fragility. Breakdowns of one kind or another play an important part in Green's work, symbolic disintegrations which emphasize the problematic ontological status of the self. Such psychological crises mysteriously descend upon characters, threatening them with 'virtual collapse' (*Co*, p.79), or with the disconcerting prospect of discovering oneself to be like another, 'not oneself'. His characters are accordingly destabilized by obsessive manias, schizophrenic states, paranoiac outbursts, catatonia and hallucinations. There is no mysterious central core which unites the self in Green's novels: his characters instead frequently have large zones of experience missing or unavailable to them, and breakdowns of one sort or another are ominously common. Charley Summers, Mrs Grant (who shares the same christian name, Amy, as Pye's sister), Pye, Roe, Mary's daughter Brid, and Liz Rock, "sick with her mind" and having undergone a "breakdown from overstrain" (pp.9, 7), all suffer mental collapses. Several of the characters of *Party Going* know of people who have been institutionalized: Miss Fellowes' friend Daisy, wrongly carted off to an asylum, or Alex's father, 'locked away', as well as his sister, who also has "something the matter with her", according to Claire (pp.237-38). Pye's sister is certainly 'not right in the head', and is committed to an asylum. And this list does not include the numerous characters who succumb to their particular manias and lock themselves in their rooms (Mrs Welch, Adams, Paddy the lampman). Old Dupret, Miss Fellowes, and Mr Grant all sink into comas, a state of literal non-being. Old Dupret lies like a crippled submarine 'for days upon the bed of the ocean' while divers 'tap out messages to it and the survivors tap out answers to the divers' (*Li*, p.93), until all hope is abandoned; Mr Grant lies 'frozen', expressing 'nothing', 'shut-eyed, motionless, speechless, hopeless' (*Ba*, pp.156, 164); Miss Fellowes' personality is submerged beneath figurative tides and storms.

The strangeness of *Pack My Bag*'s negotiations with the past parallels the problems Green's characters encounter with their memories. Amnesia or temporary memory losses impair their ability to function socially. It is a world in which, as the Grants' family doctor suggests, nature "draws a blackout over what she doesn't want

remembered” (Ba, p.158). Such obliterations of the past, of course, inevitably erase parts of the self with them - Pye, for one, tells himself that he would ““give anything to ‘ave that part back”” that he has now misremembered (Ca, p.167). *Back*’s Charley goes into fugues during which he loses track of time and place, blanking out while walking only to come to, ‘still the same day and he was gazing into a tailor’s’. His temporal sense deserts him along with his bearings, so that queue-jumping to use a telephone ‘his impression was that he had been standing his turn in the queue for hours’ (p.7). His crisis of self-figuration reaches such a state that he does ‘not know what he was about’ (p.57: the phrase recalls Pye’s blackly comic visits to the mental institution, which so traumatize him that ‘what with believing, then disbelieving, he could not remember afterwards how he got out’ (Ca, p.141)). Mrs Grant, on the other hand, suffers from a gross inability to recognise people, a perfect trope for Green’s decidedly amnesiac narrative.

A striking illustration of Green’s readiness to destabilize identity is the transformation effected between the manuscript of *Caught* and the published novel which changed Dy from Richard’s wife to his sister-in-law. This was at the insistence of the wartime censor, unwilling to approve the novel’s sanctioning of wartime adultery. Green’s solution to this was to make Richard a widower and Dy his sister-in-law. These crucial last minute changes, Jeremy Treglown’s introduction to the Harvill text notes, were implemented swiftly and with little amendment⁴⁹. The revisions largely keep the original dialogue, while adding deliberately clumsy explanations. Richard talks to his wife Dy just as he talks to his wife’s sister Dy, with only the transposed observation (‘as though she were her dead sister’) to remind the reader of the distinction. Or the line

“it must have been so much worse for her,” meaning his wife, and forgetting that she was dead at the time (p.174).

Richard’s confusions are therefore augmented by these curious touches. The overall structural effect of Green’s amendments is also significant, since part of the plot then comes to hinge on the fact that everyone else also thinks Dy is his wife. Identities blur, and major alterations of identity can be achieved in a mere handful of strategic

⁴⁹ Introduction to *Caught* (London: Harvill, 1991).

alterations, without to Green's mind apparent contradiction. Such displacements of identity, whereby wives become sisters, mothers stepmothers, unrelated people related, are typical of Green's novels, where identity and naming tend to be anything but clear-cut. Charley talks to Nancy as if she were her half-sister Rose; Richard talks to Dy as if she was his wife, not his sister-in-law.

1.5.7 Problems of nomination

In Green's work the proper name, tellingly, is often liable to sudden and unexpected transformation. Just as the pseudonym goes through its revisions, all obscuring Green's own proper name, so too do we find that names 'distract' in the fiction, where competing identities and alterations of name are commonplace. The narrator of *Caught* refers at random to its protagonist as either 'Richard' or 'Roe' without consistently adopting a settled form of address, while the rest of the cast have curiously pseudogeneric names - 'Chopper', 'Pye' or 'Wal'. Pye and Roe dissolve into each other to mimic the Greek word for fire; 'Rose', interchangeable as proper name, noun, or verb, is quite literally constituted in language throughout *Back* (Middlewitch's 'Charley Rose' offers another compound identity). Green, using the same phrase which oddly explains the pseudonym, stresses her name 'Rose' is also 'of all names'; just as Charley meets James, 'of all people, of all imaginable men' in the graveyard (p.9). *Back*'s Dorothy Pitter is reduced to a typographical cypher ('Dot'), whereas the false detective of *Party Going* and the sergeant in *Concluding* both resist naming altogether. The false detective is variously described as the 'man *who had eyed*' or 'that man, *who had spoken* to Miss Fellowes earlier' (pp.25, 50), culminating in the absurdly circumlocutory reference to

the man *who had* been with Miss Fellowes in the bar *and had* spoken to her and watched her *and who had* followed when she had been carried up (p.79, my emphases).

The text conspicuously refuses to name him, sticking instead to demonstrative pronouns, variously referring to him as 'this man' (pp.79, 82); 'that little man' (pp.82, 84); 'the little man' (p.83). 'Who is that man?', Angela emblematically asks:

for without a name, *any name*, this “mystery man” is uncategorizable: he may or may not be a hotel detective, an ‘escaped poisoner’ (p.82), a criminal (“he might be Arsene Lupin, easy”, remarks Thomson) or merely a hanger-on. He has no name, no occupation, no stable idiom to place him socially: he is a man ‘who might be anybody’, as the narration suggests (p.204). If ‘character’ is merely an assembly of traits around a proper name, then not having a proper name is, potentially, to evade classification altogether.

Or you can have numerous characters named similarly, with equally puzzling effects. *Party Going*’s narrating agency completes a sweeping panorama of the station forecourt, recording ‘thousands of Smiths, thousands of Alberts, hundreds of Marys’ (p.150). To this we can add the Charleys in *Caught and Back*; the Richards in *Living and Caught*; the Roses, real and imagined, of *Back*; and the confusing double Alberts in *Loving*. Then there are the cases of mistaken identity (Mrs Grant, for instance, is convinced Charley is someone else (“You aren’t John, are you?”) (*Ba*, p.20)). The girls in *Concluding*’s Institute, set up to fulfil an “unlimited demand for State Servants” (p.117), all oddly have names beginning with the letter “m”. The levelling process of the latter’s future totalitarian state seeks to subsume the individual into the collective, a brave new world which suppresses name, identity and origin, ritually dramatizing Green’s own unease with name and social background. In a world in which the girls are interchangeable, all ‘called alike’ (p.30), names blur, as a lengthy montage of unidentified and unidentifiable voices proves (pp.182-83).

Loving employs a subtle form of antonomasia. To be a footman in Kinalty is to be automatically given someone else’s name, “Arthur”. Charley Raunce, Green’s protagonist, indeed starts the novel

called by that name as every footman from the first had been called, whose name had really been Arthur, all the Toms, Harrys, Percys, Victors one after the other, all called Arthur (p.8).

When Charley is promoted from footman (‘Arthur’) to acting butler he acquires a ‘new title’ (p.19), a semantic equivalent to his hierarchical progress, and thus becomes ‘Mr Raunce’. His whole manner and bearing change accordingly after this, as his fellow servants note: ‘The authority Raunce seemed to have acquired since Mr Eldon’s death must have impressed them all’ (p.98). Giving people names is

ridiculed in this confusion of functions and character - Mrs Tennant even jokes that ““I don’t like that name [Raunce]. I think we shall have to change it don’t you?””(p.21). Charley, who has little choice in the matter, is variously referred as ‘Arthur’, ‘Charley’, ‘Mr Raunce’, or just ‘Raunce’.

Like the memoir of *Back*, which carefully reverses the sex of its doubled tale (telling of similar men where the main narrative deals with similar women), Green’s fiction is also much given to mirror-image disturbances of identity. In *Loving* we learn that ““Michael’s eldest boy [...] is dressed as a girl”” (p.26)⁵⁰. Just how bizarrely wrong the process of nomination can get can be seen in a series of strange identity and gender crises. For a curious convention of Green’s fiction is the displacement of identity problems from characters to their animals. Joan’s tomcat in *Blindness* is called ‘Minnie’; in *Caught* Christopher’s dog, ‘not right in the head’, is stuck between both gender and identity, alternately known as ‘Acorn’ or ‘Actress’. This, like the generation of the pseudonym (‘of all names’) is left ambiguous, having come about for ‘some reason’ (p.29). *Concluding*’s sergeant, struck by Rock’s goose called ‘Ted’, remembers how, in reverse, ““We have a cat at home, a tom, and we call her Paula”” (p.72).

1.5.8 Changes of origin

As with the assumption of a pseudonym, a change of name represents a figurative change of identity. This understandably interests Green: Charley insists on being known as Mr Raunce; Nancy, perhaps in preparation for having metaphorically to become Rose for Charley, has herself already ‘changed her name back by deed poll’ after her husband is killed in action (*Ba*, p.114); John Haye tries to reinvent Joan as June. Other quite literal changes of identity can be seen in the unusual family relationships which run through the fiction. They no doubt mirror Green’s own sense of social unease and, through the assumption of the persona, symbolic repudiation of his origins (particularly the uneasy relationship with his parents which *Pack My Bag*

⁵⁰ *The Waste Land* looms potentially as influence here: Eliot’s use of Tiresius as (another blind) sage poised between genders, wandering in a disfunctional urban world, and - interestingly, articulating different voices - a theme naturally reflecting Green’s own obsessions.

suggests). The Oedipal sub-texts of *Blindness* and *Nothing*, the questions of birth, parentage and incest which recur in *Caught* and *Back*, or the parent-less world of *Concluding*, all undermine the family unit. These are changeling fantasies, which inevitably reflect back towards Green's own desire to repudiate origins. Certainly family relationships are often oddly negotiable in his novels. Nancy can move in with the Grants as if they were her own family (leaving her own mother, interestingly), while Mrs Grant for her part mistakenly assumes Charley is part of it - which, had he married Rose, he would indeed have been. "I might be your own mother, when all's said and done", she later tells him (p.172). There are many other curious surrogate relationships: in *Blindness* Mrs Haye is not actually John's real mother; Craigan, Lily's "grandfather", takes on the parenting role while her real father, Joe Gates, acquiesces; Amy abducts Christopher to have a child of her own. Green's characters worry about the strength of blood ties: Charley, 'busy in the quest of a likeness to himself', wonders whether Ridley might be his child and not James' (p.84); in *Nothing* Philip and Mary, due to be married, worry that they might be related, and wander about asking people if they look similar. Philip is indeed mocked for his absurd "family complex" (p.227), which gets on all the other characters' nerves. *Pack My Bag*, perhaps more surprisingly, remembers how life at school 'was primitive. We apologized for blood relationships, they had no place' (p.99).

1.6 PROVISIONAL CONCLUSIONS

We can conclude, therefore, that the autobiography and novels emphasize the unknowability of personality; the analysis of which might, borrowing Green's own metaphor, be likened to an endless game of pass-the-parcel, forever stripping away layers, without discovering a core within. Like the suggestion that characters are as much articulated *by* language as articulators *of* it, this idea provides the basis for the final novels, where Green, in his new position of distrust, refuses to explain what lies behind his characters' dialogues.

The conclusion that Green's autobiographical exercise reaches regarding the nature of personality is that this elusive self resembles an 'other'. What one writes about the self inadvertently becomes, as Lacan puts it,

'empty' speech, where the subject seems to be talking in vain about someone who, even if he were his spitting image, can never become one with the assumption of his desire (*Ecrits*, p.45).

In writing about himself the autobiographer 'ends up by recognizing that this being has never been anything more than his construct in the imaginary', an essential misapprehension which prompts the inevitable assessment that

in this labour which he undertakes to reconstruct *for another*, he rediscovers the fundamental alienation that made him construct it *like another*, and which has always destined it to be taken from him *by another* (*Ecrits*, p.42).

Or, as Beckett's *Unnamable* declares, while 'I seem to speak, it is not I, about me, it is not about me'⁵¹. This idea of the *other* uncannily emerges as an issue in Green's scattered output in the 1950s, following the publication of what would prove to be his final novel, *Doting*. Excluding a series of articles all subsequent projects would be abandoned - a 1955 play (*Journey out of Spain*); a farce which remains unpublished from the following year (*All on His Ownsome*); fragments from the 'London and Fire 1939-1945' project; and finally plans which petered out for an autobiographical sequel (provisionally called 'Pack My Bag Repacked') in the 1960s. The mood of these articles is one of increasing despair; one such pessimistic piece Green would title 'Unloving', a deliberately negating reference to *Loving*, by a novelist no longer writing novels, to his past novelistic career. Henry Green, this suggests, is washed up and should be filed away with those who have 'not much left' anymore (p.282). The marked emphasis on the gift threatening to undo itself, never far from the surface in *Pack My Bag* or the body of fiction as a whole, reaches its inevitable climax in the bleak autobiographical sketch 'For Jenny with Affection' (1963). Here, finally, the threatened dissociation in the 'Henry Green' program finally occurs. In it the Green/ Yorke dichotomy collapses as the writing persona splits from the self that writes, schizophrenically alternating between first person and third-person narrative:

Green lives with his wife in Belgravia. *He* has now become a hermit. Only the other day a woman of

⁵¹ *The Unnamable*, in *The Beckett Trilogy: Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable* (London: Picador, 1979), p.267.

sixty looking after the tobacconist's shop was dragged by her hair across the counter and stabbed twice in the neck. That is one reason why *I* don't go out anymore.

The article makes the highly fractured statement that '*Green* tells *me* he doesn't believe in anything at all'. In these sentences narrative voice and identity collapse: the writing mask is, effectively, cast aside as an empty stratagem, reflecting the sad realization offered that 'Green can write novels, but his present difficulty is to know quite how to do it' ('FJA', p.284, my emphases). The Bluebeard, *doppelgänger* self finally forces a definitive neurotic split. While the formulation is melodramatic⁵², this short article represents Green's last written piece.

Where once the persona served to channel instability and creativity, now the function appears instead reversed upon itself. Green, it would seem, required his two identities, Henry Green, writer, and Henry Yorke, businessman, to coexist: much as the fiction suggests, as double halves of a whole. Certainly his ceasing to write coincided with ceasing to work, coupled with the decline of the firm's fortunes. In the light of this there seems a strange prescience in certain pronouncements made many years before in the fiction: *Blindness* likens the loss of sight to the loss of impetus and routine: after it "life goes on just the same, only half of it is lopped off" (p.190). In *Living* Craigan is permanently demoralized by being pensioned off: 'When he had lain in bed, when he should have been at work, then rhythm had stopped for him' (p.205). As *Living* prophecies;

when men who have worked these regular hours are now deprived of work, so, often, their lives come to be like puddles on the beach where tide no longer reaches (p.204).

James Lees-Milne, noting Green's own ambivalence to his father (all those Oedipal dramas in the fiction, locatable anxieties of origin, those villainous old men), wrote

I assume there was some very subtle connection between Henry Yorke's father and Henry Green's novels. Without the nits in the hair inspiration flagged ('HY, HG', pp.391-92).

⁵² Andrew Salmon, for instance, correctly calls this 'the self-conscious voicing of a persona', (although he goes on to suggest that 'the adopted voice provides a sanctuary', which seems somewhat puzzling). (*The Novels of Henry Green: 'A Life Continuing beyond the Book'* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Liverpool, 1988), p.453).

Alan Ross's autobiography suggests in similar fashion that 'the end of office life seemed to result in the end of life for him altogether'⁵³. 'Henry's business life, while it lasted, was a key source of inspiration for his novels, but increasingly, as things started to go wrong, it was to prove a drain on his energies for writing', testifies Sebastian Yorke in *Surviving*, adding, 'After *Doting* my father never spoke of doing another novel' ('Memoir', p.299).

⁵³ *Coastwise Lights* (London: Collins Harvill, 1988), p.110.

2 THE WAR YEARS: INSTABILITY AS STIMULUS

2.1 INTRODUCTION: INSTABILITY AS THE 'ABSOLUTE GIFT'

This chapter introduces the concept of instability as stimulus, arguing that the war years are central to the unstable vision. The experience of London at war was, Green felt, an 'absolute gift' to the artist; a particularly impressive response when we consider the general context of contemporary revulsion. Where others felt the concept of 'things breaking up' implacable to art, Green instead found it intensely stimulating. The instability of the time acted like a magnet for the unstable vision, ensuring Green's most productive and creative period as a writer. During the 1930s he wrote but one novel, *Party Going*; between 1940 and 1946, three novels, an autobiography, and a variety of articles for wartime journals, including a series of fire-fighting accounts.

In the first section of the chapter I propose to start by outlining contemporary attitudes to war-writing, particularly focusing upon those areas most frequently felt by others to be problematic for the novelist, in order to contextualize Green's strikingly different response to the time. We shall be looking at various destabilizations effected by the war - its enormous impact on social behaviour, the threat of physical danger and of unfamiliar conditions, and its concentration of fears on an unpredictable future - and demonstrating how and why they were for Green sources of creative inspiration. His creative reanimation, or capacity to transcend precisely those problems elsewhere regarded as implacable, is a direct consequence of this peculiar coincidence of fictional obsessions and historical conditions - a reanimation which Green makes quite explicit, by choosing in each of his texts to address different problematic issues of wartime writing. These are the themes of the second and third sections of the chapter, which focus upon the peculiar aspects of wartime life which so powerfully attracted Green and effectively quicken the unstable vision. In his war texts Green develops the idea of textual fracture: his work is alive to the possibilities of fragmentation, disintegration and temporal instability, and sensitive to the possibilities of borrowing from other idioms and genres (discussion of *Caught*'s peculiar narrative structure, and its influence on Green's

subsequent narrative strategies, shall be considered separately in section 4.4). His attitude to language and in particular description is tested by the very real problems that extraordinary conditions pose the writer; and his experiments into the nature of character are given fresh impetus by unusual conditions of pressure, enclosure, forced social collisions, entrapment and mental collapse. Green's flexibility, as we shall see, proves to be increasingly relevant to the unstable vision's development: his readiness to look beyond the novel for inspiration, and his subsequent, increasingly ruthless experimentation with the novel. The final part of the chapter, accordingly, cross-refers Green's wartime obsessions with contemporary developments in philosophy, demonstrating the unstable vision's increasing compatibility with existentialism, thus forming another key shared antecedent with the future new French novel.

2.2 THE WAR AS REANIMATION

2.2.1 Problems of writing the war

Few British writers, during the Second World War, expressed much confidence in the novel. The need to deliver a considered response to these new conditions of wartime existence seemed paramount to home-based writers. As one 1941 article in the *Times Literary Supplement* suggested, the war posed writers a 'puzzle': 'what place, after all, has the war in the pattern of human reality the novelist extracts from human experience'?¹. Problems of perspective (what angle to approach conditions from), and treatment (what imaginative level to adopt), would be much argued over during this period by novelists and critics alike, many of whom explicitly questioned whether any novelist could imaginatively write the war. Alex Comfort, writing in *Horizon* in 1942, felt that no novelist could find 'the task which is demanded of him congenial or readily reduced to a really creative and possible form'². Precisely what "possible forms" might best be employed to write the war would be hotly debated throughout the war. Some argued that the writer's creative imperative was to respond to these changing times; others that the war should be approached obliquely, left to

¹ Unsigned, 'The War Puzzle', *TLS*, 5 April 1941, p.171.

² 'On Interpreting the War', *Horizon* 5 (1942), pp.358-362 (358).

some later date, or even ignored altogether. Both strategies carried inevitable dangers: the former demanded that a delicate balance be struck between being appropriately topical yet at the same time offering a considered imaginative rereading of events; the latter, that avoiding the war should not be synonymous with taking an obviously escapist way out, an unacceptable deferment of issues that should be faced. What was needed was a magic shortcut, a quick solution which would achieve the correct 'level of imagination' and in doing so successfully 'acknowledge the experience of the war'³.

Few novelists took up this gauntlet. Tom Harrisson's survey conducted for *Horizon* in 1941 of novels written since the declaration of war two years looked at 'literally every book which has anything to do with the war', only to note gloomily the 'very small number of writers who have trickled out anything at all interesting' - a lack of creativity which he attributed to the 'more powerful and less manageable pressures of gigantic war'⁴. Few, he suggests, had successfully come to terms with the war. A not unfair assessment so early on perhaps, at a time of ignominious reverse after reverse (starting with the fall of most of mainland Europe; the embarrassments of Dunkirk and the Norwegian expedition; the Nazi-Soviet pact; the Blitz and still-threatened invasion, all of which left England surrounded by hostile forces), a period when the writer's position, like the country itself, could be compared to a desperate struggle to avoid being 'crushed by the encroaching detail of circumstance'⁵. But by 1945 novels which had successfully dealt with wartime issues were still few and far between, and looking back the next year Rose Macaulay could conclude that, on balance, the war had been an incomprehensible disaster for the novel,

too vast, too gross, too ill-understood; it has clogged and stunned imagination, and intelligent activity has been paralysed [...] the effect of war on imagination and manner is incalculable⁶.

Among the London-based writers a common complaint was that the city's atmosphere was peculiarly suffocating. Neither Virginia Woolf, who compared the

³ Unsigned, 'The Indestructible', *TLS*, 31 October 1942, p.533.

⁴ 'War Books', *Horizon* 4 (1941), pp.416-37 (418, 436).

⁵ Frank Swinnerton, 'The Decay of the Novel', *Spectator* 169 (1942), pp. 32-33.

⁶ 'The Future of Fiction', *New Writing and Daylight* 7 (1946), pp. 71-74 (73).

war to 'a desperate illness'⁷, or Rosamond Lehmann, who in one of her wartime short stories likened it to a 'child too big to get born', found the stresses and strains of the war-years at all inspiring. Lehmann very effectively demonizes it, caricaturing the war as something which must be buried and 'shovelled underground, disgracefully, as monsters are', to be forgotten until, 'after a while, with returning health and a change of scene, we would forget that we conceived it'⁸.

A curious feature of much wartime writing would indeed be complaining about the war's deleterious effect on fiction: talking about the impossibility of writing is as much a characteristic of the war as not actually writing anything at all. Elizabeth Bowen felt that the world

was stupefying [...] The simple way to put it was: 'One cannot take things in'. What was happening was out of all proportion to our faculties for knowing, thinking and checking up⁹.

Most responses concentrated on the war's debilitating powers, its ability to push things 'out of all proportion'. As a character in J. B. Priestley's novel *Black-out in Gretley* (1942) suggests:

"We don't face this war all the time. In fact, most of the time we really dodge the stupendous terrifying reality of it, and merely try to come to terms with its various inconveniences and restrictions. But now and again, when we're tired and dispirited, the whole weight of it suddenly comes down on us"¹⁰.

The obvious alternative was to avoid attempting to describe them altogether. If the raw materials seemed for the present intractable, the novelist might indeed be justified in turning away from them. Even before the war commentators were already questioning the ability of fiction to respond to the changing situation: a *TLS* article from May 1939, for example, declared that any worthwhile fictions could only be produced elsewhere, maybe in

America, or at any rate from over the sea and far away, where a near-war consciousness has less than

⁷ *A Writer's Diary: Being Extracts from the Diary of Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Leonard Woolf (London: Hogarth Press, 1953), pp. 339 (24 July 1940), 332 (20 May 1940).

⁸ 'When the Waters Came', in *The Gipsy's Baby, and Other Stories* (London: Collins, 1946), pp.93-112 (93).

⁹ Preface to the American edition of 'The Demon Lover', in *Collected Impressions* (London: Longmans, Green, 1950), p.49.

¹⁰ *Black-Out in Gretley: A Story of - and for - Wartime* (London: Heinemann, 1942), p.10.

the whole field to itself or can be indulged with an air of greater detachment¹¹.

Creative deferment, letting the dust settle and waiting for the return of a more stable time, conveniently reinterpreted the war as a 'piling up of material', in Kate O'Brien's phrase, for future writers. 'The nations of our convulsed world will require each its own Tolstoy - when that kind of vitality returns', she added¹².

There was also a more practical explanation to hand: novel-writing, more than any other literary medium, takes time - time which was clearly at a premium. Given the bewildering rapidity of change, how was the novelist to keep up? As a *New Statesmen and Nation* reviewer wrote in 1940:

With the general scene loose in outline, obscure in detail, threatened with erasure and redrafting, it is impossible for the novelist to sketch out a theme with any certainty that it won't be obsolete by the time he reaches his eighty thousandth word¹³.

Two years later Evelyn Waugh published two fragments of a novel, abandoned for precisely this reason - retitled, appropriately enough, *Work Suspended*. He added an apologetic preface:

This is the book on which I was at work in September, 1939. It is now clear to me that even if I were again to have the leisure and will to finish it, the work would be vain, for the world in which and for which it was designed, has ceased to exist¹⁴.

The rapidity of change, Waugh felt, had sabotaged his novel, its obsolescence ensured by the outbreak of war. Being topical, then, was to court formidable risks; novel writing takes time; and time, as Waugh's obsolete fragments suggested, was moving at an alarming pace.

Fragmentation would become a central issue in this debate. In *Between the Acts* (itself a typically *unfinished* text) Virginia Woolf persuasively plays upon the theme of 'scraps, orts and fragments', an emblematic phrase for war-fiction. Elizabeth Bowen, for instance, recoiled from what she saw as the war's fragmentation, writing that 'it is by dislocations, by recurrent checks to his desire for meaning, that the

¹¹ Unsigned, 'Novels of the Week', *TLS*, 27 May 1939, p.311.

¹² Kate O'Brien, 'Fiction', *Spectator* 166 (1941), p.326.

¹³ Desmond Hawkins, 'Home and Away', *New Statesman and Nation* 20 (1940), p.520.

¹⁴ *Work Suspended: Two Chapters of an Unfinished Novel* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1942), p[ix].

writer is most thrown out'¹⁵. In similar fashion Rose Macaulay stated that 'life has during the past years been disintegrated, broken into odd, unshapely bits [...] discontinuity has been the mood of our brittle time'. 'Can we fit the pieces together, weld them into a coherent shape?', she wondered ('Future of Fiction', p.72). Things were indeed cracking up: Stephen Spender similarly noted how 'Words seem to break in my mind like sticks when I put them down on paper'¹⁶. Robert Conquest's 'Poem in 1944' imaginatively matches this sense of fragmentation:

For I must believe
That somewhere the poet is working who can handle,
The flung world and his own heart. To him I say
The little I can. I offer him the debris
Of five years undirected storm in self and Europe¹⁷.

Was, then, war 'peculiarly destructive to the novelist, because he is the most closely concerned with what war most conspicuously dilapidates, our daily thoughts and feelings', as Raymond Mortimer claimed?¹⁸ How melodramatic or exaggerated contemporary pessimism was is open to debate¹⁹. Yet it is indisputable that few significant novels were published during the period: as Peter Conrad suggests, the Second World War was apparently 'a war to which literature conscientiously objected'²⁰. Certainly other literary genres did fare conspicuously better: in the field of poetry, despite suffering by comparison to the Great War, important wartime poems or collections, most notably by Eliot, Dylan Thomas and Edith Sitwell; a renaissance in the short story or novella category, particularly in the early years of the war; and a variety of documentary accounts of wartime service. Rival forms of

¹⁵ 'Contemporary', *New Statesman and Nation* 23 (1942), p.340.

¹⁶ *Journals 1939-1983*, ed. by John Goldsmith (London: Faber and Faber, 1985), p.23.

¹⁷ 'Poem in 1944', in *Poems* (London: Macmillan, 1955), p.47.

¹⁸ 'Two Novels', *New Statesman and Nation* 28 (1944), pp.224-25 (224).

¹⁹ An understandable element of self-pity underlies many of these declarations of malaise and frustration. *Horizon's* editor, Cyril Connolly, would melodramatically proclaim (under the pseudonym of 'Palinurus') a "word cycle" of disillusion, claiming to be undertaking an 'experiment in self-dismantling, a search for the obstruction which is blocking the flow from the well' (*The Unquiet Grave: A Word Cycle* (London: Hamilton, 1945), pp.15-16, pp.2-3). Much soul-searching now seems alarmingly premature, as if the unduly problematic nature of wartime fiction had been established in advance. The first wartime issue of the *New Statesman and Nation*, for example, would already refer to a 'literary black-out', looking instead to a future 'post-war renaissance' (John Mair, 'New Novels', *NS & N* 18 (1939), p.377).

²⁰ Peter Conrad, quoted in Paul Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp.132-33.

media, more flexible than the novel constrained by those daunting and time-consuming eighty thousand words waiting to be written, flourished: journalism, the documentary film, the photographic record. All seemed, perhaps, better placed to deal with events.

2.2.2 The 'absolute gift' of instability

It is into this context that we can place Green's startlingly different reaction to writing the war. His work, unlike this somewhat self-conscious catalogue of woes voiced by other writers and critics, clearly delighted in the same instability his contemporaries so dramatically recoiled from. During wartime he tellingly told Rosamond Lehmann that the 'truth is, these times are an absolute gift to the writer'. 'Everything is breaking up. A seed can lodge or sprout in any crack or fissure', he continued²¹. Green's imagination was, figuratively, shaped by war: as Edward Stokes suggests, the period would, to borrow James' phrase, become the 'crucible of his imagination'. Clearly for Green the lack of any 'stable point' was no obstacle, while the 'odd, unshapely bits' and 'debris' of war offered creative possibilities, not imaginative barriers - as *Pack My Bag* suggests, it is the 'threat of war which drives one into a last attempt to explain objectively and well' (p.165). Green's art, as the autobiography, talking of the necessary 'threat' to make one write, suggests, positively thrives on risk. Certainly to discover creative inspiration in a collapsing world his contemporaries almost universally recoiled from, to be enthusiastic about a fragmentation elsewhere dreaded by writers, contrasts markedly to the prevailing context of creative gloom and pessimism directed at the difficulties of war-writing. Green, unusually, seemed 'perfectly centred in the times', according to Rosamond Lehmann, 'free to settle nowhere, everywhere, at home in ruins, on fruitful terms with rubble, explosions, flames and smoke' ('An Absolute Gift', p.41).

This reanimation is all the more significant when we consider that the war seems to have had on Green the opposite effect to almost everyone else: rather than

²¹ quoted by Rosamond Lehmann, 'An Absolute Gift', *TLS*, 6 August 1954, p.41. The same year Connolly's *Horizon* suggested much the same thing in an boldly titled editorial ('Why Not War Writers? A Manifesto'), which emphasized how 'To-day, subjects abound' (*Horizon* 22 [1941], p.228).

paralysing creativity, in his case it revitalized his career as a writer. Despite the undergraduate success of *Blindness*, and his brilliant version of foundry life, some three years later in 1929, the 1930s proved to be lean years for Green the writer. He published just one novel, *Party Going* (dated, tellingly, '1931-38'): and this, despite its 1930s iconography, does ignore most of the key issues of the time that other writers of his generation did attempt to address (there is, for example, no mention of any of the numerous economic and political crises). All this reverses with the war, a time for Green of intense productivity, despite working in effect a triple life (split between forty-eight hour shifts on duty with the A. F. S., days off working for Pontifex, and writing in the remaining time). This prompted his publisher, John Lehmann, who particularly admired the Blitz short-stories, to comment that he thought it 'astonishing' that Green could have produced work so good, or at such 'extraordinary speed' (*I Am My Own Brother*, p.109). Other writers before the war found themselves at an impasse once it had started; Green was rescued from an impasse by it, needing the jolt to his complacency. The war even offers a conscious reanimation: *Party Going*'s problematic pigeon, locus for that novel's fears and dreads - and so intractable as to appear symbolic of the protracted genesis of the text - makes an oblique cameo in *Caught*'s Blitz, 'on the ground, walking in circles into the flames, fascinated' (p.194). The writer is, phoenix-like, reborn from the ashes of past creative dilemmas, his creative impetus regained²². Fire is also, as we shall see, Green's own symbol for the destruction of the existing social order, symbolized by the Tennants' anachronistic "castle", scheduled to be razed to the ground.

Green found the dislocations of wartime existence fundamentally challenging, and they in turn sparked his creative reanimation: the specific conditions of wartime life were absolutely fortuitous, an 'absolute gift' through which the external world seemed, crazily, to have merged with his own personal obsessions. The various instabilities of wartime life - its unexpected threats, startling social juxtapositions, bizarre lighting effects, sudden alternations of mood and circumstance - are all put to creative use in the fiction. As the 'Apologia' hints, a writer's creativity is closely linked to his ability to immerse himself in the *zeitgeist*, to 'learn to write in the idiom

²² Phoenixes were on Green's mind: 'The Old Lady' makes the curious analogy that 'A good shot will take a phoenix always at the same angle' ('TOL', p.112). Dylan Thomas also uses phoenixes in 'Unluckily for a Death'.

of the time' (p.97) - a knack which Green, the social amphibian, would rediscover during his time as an auxiliary fireman, forced once again to plunge into situations strange.

Green's novels carefully address and work within precisely those problems which were commonly assumed to be unduly problematic for wartime fiction, thereby making his reanimation all the more unmistakable. In the Lambourne interview Green talks about picking up the pieces and putting them back together again ('NTH', p.64), a motif which is highly relevant to the war-fiction. These texts both reinhabit the tired clichés and failed solutions adopted by other writers, and are also just as prepared to cannibalise whatever material lies at hand. *Pack My Bag* is simultaneously a text writing about fragmentation and a text which is *itself* fragmented. It is both a hastily packed collection of material which, Green claims, 'otherwise would be used in novels', and a text which incorporates the short story, 'A Private School in 1914', already published in 'Folios of New Writing'. In similar fashion *Caught* reworks the unpublished Blitz material of 'The Old Lady'; while *Back* absorbs one of two selections from a book in Green's family collection which he had translated for *Horizon* in 1944.

2.2.3 Reanimating the war

The first of these reanimations is *Pack My Bag*. Green published it in 1940, at time when, as John Hodgson notes,

an increasing number of authors began to look back nostalgically to the relatively happy and innocent experiences of childhood before being caught up in a troubled and war-torn world²³.

The popularity of the autobiographical genre, at such a point in time, was unmistakable. Looking away from the present to the past offered a way of bypassing the war and, in particular for the novelist, a way of avoiding writing fiction. Many autobiographers excused themselves in advance for ignoring present affairs; Edwin

²³ *The Search for the Self: Childhood in Autobiography and Fiction since 1940* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), p.11.

Muir, for instance, writing between 1939 and 1940, limited his autobiography to 1922, explaining in a preface that 'I felt that I could not write with any degree of clarity of late occurrences; they are still too close to me'²⁴. Now, avoiding the present, and avoiding writing fiction, are indeed restrictions which *Pack My Bag* also announces. Published the same year as Muir's text, it too claims that 'a great deal is indistinguishable through being so close, too near to put down' (p.236); adopts a similar limiting time-scale, and wastes no time reminding the reader of its provisional status as an interim novel. But here the similarities stop. As we have seen in chapter one, Green is not interested in escaping from a problematic present to some remote and untroubled childhood of peace and tranquillity; his text is obsessed with 'how things now seem'. Time is cracking up, and the present is always collapsing into an irretrievable past. And so the desire to 'recapture and understand and detail that lost possibility of Eden', the defining feature of many nostalgic autobiographical accounts of the period, meets its antithesis in *Pack My Bag*'s air of pessimistic gloom²⁵. And Green would later reclassify it as only 'mostly autobiographical', aptly so considering the numerous ways in which he violates or rewrites the accepted codes of autobiography. The result, as we have seen, is an autobiography as much concerned with present fears of war as it is about the past, which moreover overlaps past and present wars.

Caught and the A. F. S. short-stories can easily be classified in the burgeoning "London during the Blitz" genre of war-writing. The 'eye-witness' account, or fire-fighting "procedural" would become, following the Dunkirk evacuation, enormously popular. Numerous novellas, short stories, and first-hand reports, were published, supplying an apparent 'unbounded eagerness' for eye-witness accounts²⁶. However, as critics took pains to point out, simply documenting the war was not the same as creatively *transforming* it. Such accounts owed much of their popularity to the fact that 'the mere description of what is widely unfamiliar satisfies an instinct of curiosity', as the literary columns of the day were quick to note ²⁷. One *TLS* leader from 1945 would complain that

²⁴ *The Story and the Fable* (London: Harrap, 1940), p.3.

²⁵ Henry Reed, *The Novel Since 1939* (London: Longmans, Green, 1946), p.23.

²⁶ Editorial: 'Recounting the War', *TLS*, 10 May 1941, p.227.

²⁷ 'Novels of the Week: Shell Fillers', *TLS*, 25 November 1944, p.569.

autobiographical sketches of army training, the first hand accounts of fire-fighting in the blitz, the personal stories of rescue from a torpedoed merchantman - these, after all, vivid and affecting though they might be, were seldom literature²⁸.

Raymond Mortimer, who worried that the war was often 'too close to be seen in perspective', felt that the novelist might frequently 'at best [...] hardly rise above good reporting'²⁹. *Caught*, however, tackles these issues head-on, benefiting from Green's earlier short story experiments. The novel negotiates the obvious pitfalls and clichés of service-writing, transforming the idea of an eye-witness account (satirized within by Green's characters, unable to express their Blitz experiences). This is achieved without sacrificing the genuine qualities of authentic service testimony by balancing between competing strategies, maintaining a double exposure of reality and fantasy ('only 1940 in London is real', the preface states, 'It is the effect of that time that I have written into the fiction of *Caught*' (p.4)). *Caught* integrates elements of documentary - the preface's promise ('This book is about the Auxiliary Fire Service which saved London') further fulfilled in repeated present tense references to fire-fighting practices³⁰ - which sit amidst a highly complicated and imaginative narrative structure, thereby welding the strengths of authentic testimony to genuine creativity.

In *Loving* Green changes course, considering instead one of the most derided fictional modes of wartime evasion, the genre of escapist fiction. He combines a variety of different motifs from so-called escapist novels (romance in a country house, the framing fairy-tale scenario); sets it in neutral Eire, far from the depredations of war - and then ingeniously demonstrates how all these prototypical evasions can instead be turned to reflect the quite specific situation and concerns of London at war. 'Mr Jonas', one of Green's preliminary 1940 short-stories about the

²⁸ Editorial: 'The Urge to Write', *TLS*, 4 August 1945, p.367.

²⁹ 'Two Novels', p.224. By the time that J. B. Priestley published his novel, *Daylight on Saturday* in 1943 - subtitled 'A Novel about an Aircraft Factory' - he felt bound to add a disclaiming preface: 'Finally, let me say again that this is a work of fiction, not a piece of reporting, and that therefore it should be read and judged simply as a novel' (*Daylight on Saturday* (London: Heinemann, 1943), p.10).

³⁰ *Caught* frequently refers in short, deliberately unevocative sentences, to shared knowledge of the 'first weeks of war' (the opening sentence states that 'war broke out in September *we* were told to expect air raids' (p.5)), and there are numerous present tense references to standard A. F. S. procedures - the heavy-duty protective gas clothing, for instance, which 'because it excludes air, is stifling' (p.43); the firemen milling about in the rainy car park on the day of mobilization, 'creatures of the utter confusion the London Fire Brigade creates' (p.37).

Blitz, acts as a sketch for this. It carefully uses the Jonah myth - which, as Orwell had pointed out that very same year in his essay 'Inside the Whale', was the quintessential trope for this wartime desire for escapism³¹ - to narrate a rescue of a trapped civilian who remains, indeed, *indifferent* to the fire, water and chaos which surrounds him, emerging from a trapped cavity 'bone dry' and unharmed. Having examined the realities of London under fire in *Caught*, the immediate effect of Kinalty's rural setting in neutral Ireland is to suggest a startling urban-pastoral dichotomy. Nothing would be further from the truth, for *Loving* instead offers an inventive creative juxtaposition which, as in his autobiography strangely more concerned with the present than the past, actually takes the setting and trappings of rural fantasia and crafts a companion-piece which obliquely treats a variety of important wartime topics and genres.

First of all, neutral Ireland makes a particularly appropriate location. Elizabeth Bowen would write, in 1941, of the strange atmosphere of unreality pervading everything in a country where 'the omission of all war [...] gives one the feeling of an invented world'³². Kinalty Castle stands in splendid isolation from the mainland, 'in Eire where there is no black-out' (p.5), as Green stresses on the opening page; making it, apparently, a far remove from the realities of life under fire. This, however, is far from accurate: Green's 'invented world' instead subtly inhabits the war and elaborately parodies the evasions and expedients adopted in other contemporary fictions. *Loving*, for all Kinalty's apparent isolation, carefully mirrors the realities of life during the war in London: the servants bizarrely fear invasion (very real in England in 1940-41); are strangely preoccupied by 'war-work' (which they are of course shirking); and, as the narrative repeatedly suggests, the Castle is fated, like much of London, to go up in flames (in Kinalty village, after all, the Republicans have left "Every other house burned right out" (p.97)). The house has moreover 'no electric light', an equivalent technological black-out; just as, being 'almost entirely shut up' (p.14), it also curiously evokes the entrapments of life under siege. Through Mrs Welch's nephew Albert (a cockney Londoner, naturally) Green also obliquely refers to the social problem of evacuees (briefly a much-derided

³¹ He refers to 'the hold that the Jonah myth has upon our imaginations' (*Inside the Whale and Other Essays* (London: Gollancz, 1940), p.178).

³² 'Eire', *New Statesman and Nation* 24 (1941), pp.382-83 (383).

fictional sub-genre of its own³³).

Into his country house setting Green then weaves the trappings of fairy tale romance. This was another much-derided genre of wartime fiction. Rosamond Lehmann, writing for *The Spectator* in 1940, would sarcastically wonder ‘for how many years we are doomed to a spate of bright frivolous novels designed to “lighten the black-out” and “take our minds off the war”’³⁴. The opening and closing sentences of *Loving* (the text is framed within the “Once upon a... happily ever after” formulae) establish its timeless credentials. Green’s plot involves a quest for a ring, takes in a series of courtships and romances, contains an internal parable (Nanny Swift’s fairy-tale about baby doves), and takes place in a ‘castle’ filled with antique treasures, surrounded by extensive grounds through which emblematic peacocks strut ‘as though enchanted’ (p.141). Having established this ideal, Green promptly subverts it. In place of courtly love he instead shows commonplace adultery between the aristocratic Violet and Captain Davenport, and presents a travesty of working-class loves in a less than royal ‘palace’ (Kinalty’s servants entertain equally undignified passions - Kate, preposterously, for Paddy the lampman; Charley’s and Albert’s for Edith).

Touches of fantasy in particular parody the commonly-voiced dread of the ‘element of “Alice in Wonderland” introduced into novels’ during wartime³⁵. The ‘magnificence and gilt’ fails to convince for long; Kinalty is incongruously stranded in rural Ireland, and its showy grandeur is underlined by quite fruitless searches for the mythical treasure ‘of the Old Kings’ at nearby Clancarty. Indeed, the grandeur on closer inspection proves to consist of impractical and grotesque *objets d’art*, a clutter of monstrosities which would be best housed in a museum. The Blue Drawing Room has been decorated to imitate a ‘fabulous dairy’, and Mrs Jack, perching ‘on an antique Gothic imitation of a hammock slung between four black marble columns and cunningly fashioned out of gold wire’, is ‘surrounded by milking stools, pails, clogs, the cow byre furniture all in gilded wood which was disposed around to create the most celebrated eighteenth-century folly in Eire’ (pp.205, 202-3). These ever

³³ As a reviewer in 1942 wailed: the ‘evacuee theme has, by this time, been worn almost to shreds, as the very word [...] has become enough to depress the war-sick reader’ (Unsigned, ‘Fiction in Brief’, *TLS*, 29 August 1942, p.429).

³⁴ ‘New Novels’, *Spectator* 164 (1940), pp. 693-94 (693).

³⁵ Charles Morgan, ‘Menander’s Mirror: A Problem of Storytelling’, *TLS*, 7 August 1943, p.375.

more ridiculous details pastiche the luxuriant attention to trappings so characteristic of historical novels (and the house's grounds, extending the frame of parodic reference, contain an equally fake 'complete copy of a Greek temple' which sits 'Squat under this great Gothic pile' (p.113).

Green's war-texts also cleverly satirize the idea of suburban pastoral, a genre which, like autobiographical reminiscences, took on added resonance during the war. Kinalty, *Back*'s fictitious London suburb of 'Redham', and Richard Roe's house in the country, are all ostensibly oases of pastoral calm amidst the storm of war. *Caught* effectively contrasts the intensities of a ruined and subterranean urban landscape with an apparently timeless country life to which Richard flees on his extended leaves, in which things have 'not changed and shewed no immediate signs of changing' (*Ca*, p.32). In much the same fashion rose gardens, a quintessential First World War metaphor, provide a common shared memory for both Charley Summers and Richard Roe, while in *Back* Charley and Nancy shelter near the end in the rose garden of a recently-bombed out house, apocalyptically reduced to a 'red mound of light rubble, with the staircase and chimney lit a rosier red' (p.177)). But all are temporary escapes: Kinalty's pastoral is threatened by fire; Redham's rural setting, fast disappearing beneath the encroaching suburbia, is another surrogate for the blitzed metropolis, its countryside idyll threatened by the indiscriminate unmanned flying bombs; Richard's home exists as a surreal daytime counterpoint to the pressures and strains of the subterranean city by night.

Kinalty, on the surface a representative traditional country house retreat from the cares of the world, turns out instead to house a cast of worried expatriates who feel anything but at ease with their surroundings. Genuine wartime fears of invasion during the initial years are absurdly transposed onto *Loving*'s neutral Irish setting, where wild invasion rumours are fuelled by paranoia: as Charley direly warns, "'They'll make tracks for great mansions like we're in'" (p.100). The servants all feel trapped, caught between the National Service Officers allegedly waiting for them in England and "'the Germans across the water, that might invade any minute'" (p.24), and, more close at home, menaced by the I. R. A. who apparently control the surrounding countryside. As Charley puts it, "'we're at the mercy of any 'ooligan, German or Irish, situated as we are'" (p.211).

Green particularly concentrates on the theme of National duty, peppering

dialogues with satirical swipes at escapist fiction. “‘What’s the war got to do with it’”, Raunce rhetorically declares (p.17); “‘Oh yes the shops will be using that as an excuse for everything soon’”, cries Mrs Tennant, annoyed that she can no longer obtain matching stationery (p.20). Kinalty is an absurd expatriate oasis of English servants, where neutrality, or the avoidance of one’s implicit duty, is tirelessly and suffocatingly reiterated. The novel charts Charley’s successful reeducation, as he comes to accept genuine solidarity and responsibility. At the start of the novel he proclaims that “‘we’re on a good thing here all of us [...] There’s a war on, the other side’”, adding, thankfully, that “‘it looks like we’re out of it over in Eire’” (pp.45, 163). His gradual change of heart and acceptance of his duty is an important sub-theme of the novel, just as their relatives in the services back home - his sister Bell in munitions; Albert’s sister Madge in an aircraft factory - expose Mrs Tennant’s hollow catch-phrases of ‘war work’, ‘morale’, ‘keeping up appearances’, or being in ‘enemy country’ (pp.11, 186) as parodies of genuine wartime issues. Green satirizes her lack of class-solidarity: “‘I feel we should all hang together in these detestable times’” (p.11), she declares, naturally thinking not of national spirit, but simply about keeping her household running smoothly. Her selfishness highlights the need to accept collective responsibility: “‘I feel responsible [...] there’s times I consider I ought to be back to look after them’”, Charley confides to Edith, smarting at his mother’s accusation that they have been “‘...iding ourselves away in this neutral country’” (p.221). Although “‘It’s ’ard to know what’s for the best’”, Charley and Edith do decide to return to do their part, thus following in Albert’s footsteps (p.219: Albert returns to enlist as an air-gunner).

2.2.4 Charting social upheaval

‘Social affairs are disturbed beyond power of prophecy’, ominously warned a *TLS* editorial in December 1939, shortly after the start of the war³⁶. For the war immediately brought about enormous social changes, swiftly breaking down or demolishing altogether many existing social barriers, and effecting visible alterations

³⁶ Editorial: ‘A Time for Buying’, *TLS*, 16 December 1939, p.731.

to the urban fabric. Fears of first invasion and then bombardment merely accentuated the instability of social conditions, and lead once more to renewed fears about the impossibility of fictioning the period adequately. The failure of most fiction to have even attempted to address this central aspect is again conveyed, two years into the war, by Tom Harrisson's survey. In it he reached the depressing conclusion that so far most wartime texts

resolutely ignore the vast pattern of change of which we are now part [...] Ignored are the fascinating uniformities, compulsions, mechanisations and masses of this war' ('War Books', p.421).

Writing in the same year, John Lehmann agreed:

it has been one of my disappointments as an Editor to discover how little of any significance is being written as yet [...] - how little, that is, compared with the opportunity³⁷.

Few novels written during the war indeed attempted to examine or chart the 'opportunity' that the climate of social upheaval offered; in fact, the need to document social upheaval creatively simply added to the already formidable problems facing the writer.

Green's response to this 'vast pattern of change' was vitally different. His sensitivity to society and social change is an important feature of *Pack My Bag*, and this goes a way to explaining why he was so well suited to examine the implications of war on social behaviour. During the early years of the war both his autobiography and the 'Apologia', ostensibly a tribute to Doughty's *Arabia Deserta*, directly address sociological issues. As we have repeatedly seen, Green is no great respecter of genre: one of the most important aspects of his war fiction is its ability to transform apparently fixed forms and adapt them to contemporary conditions. *Pack My Bag* remembers a childhood spent during 'the forced atmosphere of war', 'under a strain'. The young Henry Yorke found this fascinating, and Green carefully emphasizes the 'opportunities this strain gave to every child to see the cracks in the façade' (p.75). He recalls a world of privilege damaged by the First World War, and, reminding the reader that there are 'not two or three social classes but hundreds well defined throughout Britain', notes that 'not one of these escaped the effects of war'

³⁷ 'Looking Back and Forward', *Folios of New Writing* 4 (Autumn 1941), pp.5-11 (10).

(p.193). When Forthampton Court is turned into a convalescent home during the First World War, Green feels it is to 'let in life as it was to be after the war was over' (p.71). As he wryly explains, during the war

people in our walk of life entertained all sorts and conditions of men with a view to self-preservation, to keep the privileges we set such store by, and which are illusory, after those to whom we were kind had won the war for us (p.68).

The second time round, it is implied, the trick will no longer work. This feeling was shared by many other writers of the time. Walter Allen, looking back in the next decade, felt profoundly disorientated, almost shipwrecked, by the transition: the 'world of our childhood and youth had changed radically: we were all in a sense displaced persons'³⁸. George Bowling, the protagonist of Orwell's *Coming Up for Air* (1939), foretells the oncoming cataclysm:

I've enough sense to see that the old life we're being used to is being sawed off at the roots. I can feel it happening [...] the world's gone wrong. They can feel things cracking and collapsing under their feet³⁹.

Things were indeed to crack and collapse, for the existing social structure was to be irrevocably altered - quite literally 'sawed off at the roots' - by the war.

The 'Apologia' offers Green's own solutions to the problems facing writers during the war. Looking at Doughty's strange and painstaking prose account of his travels in remote Arabia, Green wrote:

A question is asked us by his work. Now that we are at war, is it not the advantage for writers, and for those who read them, that they will be forced, by the need they have to fight, to go out into territories, it may well be at home [...] and that they will be forced [...] towards a style which, by the impact of a life strange to them and by their honest acceptance of this, will be pure as Doughty's was, so that they will reach each one his own style that shall be his monument? (p.96).

This paragraph amounts to a 'prospectus for contemporary writing' (Mengham, p.101): for Green, the 'miraculous way Doughty puts words together' ('Apologia', p.93), suggests that home-front writers and servicemen alike could learn from Doughty's readiness to embrace a life unfamiliar (Orwell, too, talks of the average

³⁸ *The Novel To-Day* (London: Longmans, Green, 1955), p.8.

³⁹ *Coming Up for Air* (London: Gollancz, 1939), p.194.

writer needing to have his 'middle-class ideals and prejudices tested by contact with others who are not necessarily better but are certainly different' (*Road to Wigan Pier*, p.147)). Green, another man in proletarian disguise, holds up Doughty as the ideal for war-writing. His contemporaries, he hopes, will be 'forced' by this 'impact of a life strange' to 'reach each one his own style'; their creativity revitalized by immersion in this constantly evolving wartime society. Observation of social change - what the 'Apologia' terms this 'impact of a life strange' - underpins Green's wartime fiction. War, an 'absolute gift', breaks down barriers and therefore offers fertile new situations for the novelist (this need to be shaken out of complacency to tackle subjects unfamiliar as much aimed at himself as anyone else, a whole decade apparently spent charting the foibles of his own smart set, the unexpected empathic brilliance of *Living* a somewhat distant memory).

V. S. Pritchett referred, in 1944, to the need for a 'cutting edge' to wartime reporting, located in 'the attempt to make us aware of an environment which none of us wanted to accept'⁴⁰. His analysis resembles of course Green's cry for war-writers to profit from the 'advantage' of war and discover those new worlds 'which may well be at home'. To a certain extent this would be seen in the popular wartime genre of the 'factory novel', typically describing a sample cross-section of people from all walks of life now working together for the war effort⁴¹. Factory novels, however, rarely did much more than this. Most now seem rather formless, jumping haphazardly from mini-story to the next, their perspective lost in panoramic casts or faithful reproductions of typical war settings. Green's own wartime texts go further. Having already experienced in the Birmingham foundry a 'life strange' which had indeed been 'at home', Green's credentials as someone with genuine experience of social mixing were impeccable: he was, as Rosamond Lehmann put it, well on his way to being 'perfectly centred in the times'. Certainly *Pack My Bag*'s obsession with class differences, 'those narrow, deep and echoing gulfs which must be bridged', establish Green as an amateur sociologist, a fascination with class impressively dated back to those wounded working-class soldiers billeted on the family home during the First World War, and the 'half-tones of class' which he

⁴⁰ 'Books in General', *New Statesman and Nation* 23 (1944), p.323.

⁴¹ Examples include Monica Dickens' *The Fancy* (1943); Priestley's *Black-Out in Gretley* (1942) and *Daylight on Saturday* (1943); Inez Holden's *Night Shift* (1941), and *There's No Story There* (1944).

becomes aware of (p.68). This early collision is a key encounter which, Green implies, contributes to his decision to abandon his academic studies in Oxford in favour of factory work in Birmingham. This decision displays a pseudo-anthropological zeal, a determination to research the 'mutterings of a life I did not know but feared' (p.235). A few years later comes *Living*, Green's mock-sociological thesis, its pseudo-dialectic evidence standing as documentation of 'how by far the greater number live in England' (p.217).

The war made such contrasts an inescapable part of everyday life. As the historian Paul Addison documents, the

war effort also hurled together people of different social backgrounds in a series of massive upheavals caused by bombing, conscription, and the migration of workers to new centres of war industry. Over the war as a whole there were sixty million changes of address in a civilian population of about thirty-eight million [...] class barriers could no longer be sustained⁴².

The mass evacuations from London served, as much as anything, to change social perceptions. Arthur Marwick suggests that these, in addition to the movements of people connected with the war industries, comprised a fascinating social experiment on a national scale:

the ultimately significant fact about the evacuation experience was that it brought to middle- and upper-class households a consciousness for the first time of the deplorable conditions endemic in the rookeries and warrens which still existed in Britain's great industrial cities, and so, among an articulate few, aroused a new sense of social concern⁴³.

Green's war novels are keenly attuned to such interesting juxtapositions. Working in Birmingham, *Pack My Bag* states, was to become aware of the dramatic possibilities of cultural collision, the 'crazy situations forty million people living on an island can produce'; and, observing his co-workers, Green learned to appreciate their quite extraordinary 'concentration on human behaviour' (p.239). Green, typically alert to problems of communication, keenly draws out the strains on social structure inevitably created by these rapidly changing circumstances: as Andrew Gibson points out, while Green 'deplored the barriers that English society seemed to erect between

⁴² *The Road to 1945: British Politics and the Second World War* (London: Cape, 1975), p.130.

⁴³ *War and Social Change in the Twentieth Century: A Comparative Study of Britain, France, Germany, Russia and the United States* (London: Macmillan, 1974), p.157.

people', they nevertheless 'constantly stimulated his imagination' (*RND*, p.119). For Green, who regarded even the most mundane conversations or encounters and social juxtaposition as a 'sort of gift always being made to writers by people living their own lives round writers' ('*ANR2*', p.143), the war and enlistment in the A. F. S. offered 'another life', containing 'an entirely different way of living' ('*BGF*', p.275). *Caught*, *Loving* and *Back* successfully explore the effects of involuntary social mixing between people from widely disparate backgrounds. The A. F. S. in *Caught* is a fascinating institution in which different worlds collide, and are further concentrated by the peculiarly hermetic aspects of fire-fighting life. The synopsis for 'Before the Great Fire' enlarges on this theme, describing how men 'from all classes and from many parts of Britain' were stuck together, 'living cheek by jowl [...] a situation which led to every kind of human relationship, unlikely friendships, and obvious jealousies' (p.260). *Loving*, for example, includes a most prototypical of wartime juxtapositions, a cockney evacuee on the rampage in rural Ireland. As Nanny Swift disapprovingly notes, things are changing, and

"Of course, it's the times [...] even after the last war they would never even have entertained it, the very idea [...] the cook's own nephew, dear me no. Never in your life. But it's come about..." (p.124).

In *Caught* Richard and Hilly, discussing these social upheavals, agree that the possibilities created are extremely exciting:

"Anything's possible, and all the more so now" [...]

"Then you do feel, as well, that anything is possible between people now?" [...]

"But, Richard, of course. This war's been a tremendous release for most" (p.99).

Caught's depiction of this changing environment of 'tremendous release' is highly impressive. The demands of the war effectively reformed society at random, at once breaching social gaps and simultaneously exaggerating them to, as *Pack My Bag* had predicted, reveal all the 'cracks in the façade'. In *Caught* encounters between people not used to each other are often awkward; between the Fire Station volunteers, the various hierarchies of A. F. S. life, men and women, parents and children, and so on. This produces electrifying moments - encounters 'suddenly alive', as Green later put it ('*FFPM*', p.153) - at various points in the text. Richard and Shiner find themselves

'at a loss' with each other, having 'neither of them come across anyone in the least resembling the other' (*Ca*, p.66). The relationship between Richard and Pye, culminating in the great scene when Dy and Christopher, Pye and Richard, Piper and Shiner all come together (a situation which is, characteristically, said to be 'alive' (p.147)), is equally problematic: wartime juxtapositions throw together people who would previously never have come into social contact with each other; and this, Green suggests, inevitably enriches dialogue. For, as *Pack My Bag* notes, 'only the threat of war will bring strangers to conversation with each other in the desert polite life carries with it' (p.154). An article in the wartime literary review *Kingdom Come* agreed with this:

War stimulates art, if not always happily, and no art feels the stimulus more keenly than conversation. Since the beginning of the war people talk more, and more loudly⁴⁴.

These social upheavals also resulted in a climate of greater sexual freedom, another 'tremendous release'. In those months of feeling 'in the receiver's hands' which *Pack My Bag* vividly documents, Green observes people 'taking a last look round. Picking, fingering, saying good-bye to what they could use to drape their hearts where everyone now wears his in the stress of the times' (p.186). Prudence, simplifying the analogy, tells herself that "'war is sex'" (*Ca*, p.119), and so it proves. Both Richard's affair with Hilly and Pye's with Prudence are typically relationships only possible in war, a result of the 'chances for new society that the various preparations for war, the regrouping of men' have newly created (p.70). Pye is physically excited by the coming of war (p.40); Richard is pruriently 'haunted' by women 'hunting for more farewells' in night-clubs, 'moth deadly gay, in a daze of giving' (pp. 63, 49).

Green was later to state that in the war novels he 'tried to show the passing of [...] old world to new and the strain which all this put on me' ('SG', p.8). This is clearly illustrated in *Pack My Bag* and *Loving*. On the brink of war the autobiography carefully looks at the effect of the previous war and its near-disintegration of the old

⁴⁴ Penelope Knox, 'Conversation in War-Time', *Kingdom Come* 1:2 (December 1939-January 1940), p.39. Green, in 'The Lull', adopts a similar scenario: a series of firemen idly sit about teasing each other within carefully-prescribed topics or 'traditional openings' which are discussed and elaborated with ever more improbable embellishments.

social order; social upheavals already underway in *Loving*. The latter depicts an emblematic pre-war world of privilege visibly crumbling away. The servants sense that the “‘way things are shapin’ it wouldn’t come as a surprise if places such as this weren’t doomed to a natural death so to say” (p.219), and even Mrs Tennant herself acknowledges that things “‘are not what they used to be you know” (p.10). For the increasingly obsolete Tennants, truly, “‘times are hard [...] there’s big changes under way. I shouldn’t wonder if things were never the same say what you will” (p.120). In Kinalty customs and rituals can no longer keep out the inevitable cataclysm. As the Tennants’ hold over Kinalty continues to slip their possessions go missing, and their staff dwindle thanks to a combination of illness and desertion. The novel opens with the old butler’s death; his stand-in elopes without notice with one of the maids; the gardener locks himself in and refuses to come out; the alcoholic cook has left for Dublin to see a doctor; the nanny and the housekeeper are also confined to their quarters by sickness (pp.207-8); and the under-footman has run away to enlist. The upper classes, as ineffectual as the emblematic peacocks which stroll the Castle’s grounds, are clearly no longer in any position to exercise authority.

This collapse continues in *Back*; for, as Mrs Frazier darkly hints, “‘there’s a lot of changes these days, and there’ll be many more I shouldn’t wonder” (p.11). The novel explores another social juxtaposition, addressing the pressing post-war issue of reintegration. Charley Summers returns to a dramatically changed world, to “‘conditions very different to what you remember of when you went off” (p.33), which his disorder further exaggerates. As Green’s friend Nigel Dennis’ *Cards of Identity* suggests, ‘The whole cat’s-cradle has fallen apart [...] One comes home with the keys and finds all the locks have been changed (p.149). With the publication of *Concluding* two years later, Green completes the transformation, writing of a future sterile bureaucratic world (‘what I thought it was all coming to’, he told Lambourne (‘NTH’, p.69)) loosely based on the Welfare State.

2.3 WARTIME CONDITIONS AS STIMULUS: THE BLACK-OUT

2.3.1 Obstructions of vision, Blitz intensities and cinematic acquisitions

The blacked-out city presented another 'absolute gift': the realities of black-out and the Blitz would perfectly consort with Green's imagination. This creative revelation was no doubt highly influenced by Green's unusual sensitivity to visual effects. Many painters, photographers and cinematographers reacted similarly, inspired by the same conditions which seemed to daunt the novelists and essayists already quoted. Stansky and Abrahams refer to the fortuitousness of the time on war-artists, which would during the war years establish 'a linkage, a connection, a cause and effect relationship between war and art'⁴⁵. Cecil Beaton, for instance, working with James Hennessy on *London under Fire*, felt a 'strange thrill at seeing such a lively destruction - for this desolation is full of vitality', and suggested that the 'heavy walls crumble and fall in the most romantic Piranesi forms'⁴⁶. This interest was specifically focused on the quality of light and questions of vision. Many wartime paintings are understandably preoccupied by darkness, imaginatively drawn to

a universe where the dimmed electric bulbs, fires, explosions, searchlights and moonlight assumed changing degrees of importance in the context of the black-out⁴⁷.

Such attention to colour and visual effects is altogether characteristic of Green's war novels; and, again demonstrating how the war experience coincided with his own fascinations, is an equally recurrent obsession in his pre-war novels, which also explore problems of perception and sight. In *Blindness* John, who sees 'Nothing but black', feels that he is in 'a pit of darkness', a sightless world in which all light 'has been cut off from within' (pp.51, 82, 181). *Living's* best scenes take place in the dramatic chiaroscuro of the foundry, or the hallucinatory sequence in Liverpool by night; *Party Going* describes the events of a foggy evening which makes darkness itself 'deceiving'. *Pack My Bag* talks of strategies which, though they 'make a book blind' are, nevertheless, 'no disadvantage' to the novelist (p.88); in effect, 'the basic situation of each novel is obstruction: blindness, fog, air-raids, isolation by

⁴⁵ Peter Stansky and William Abrahams, *London's Burning: Life, Death and Art in the Second World War*, (London: Constable, 1994), p.2.

⁴⁶ *The Years Between: Diaries 1939-44* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1965), p.59.

⁴⁷ Angela Weight, 'Night for Day: The Wartime Nocturne in British Painting, 1940-45', in *A Paradise Lost: The Neo-Romantic Imagination in Britain 1935-55*, ed. and with text by David Mellor (London: Barbican Art Gallery, 1987), pp. 125-28 (126).

geography or age' (North, p.49). All of these, Green suggests, are situations which inspire rather than discourage.

Caught is particularly acquisitive of cinematic effects, obsessively drawing upon cinematic metaphors to write the Blitz⁴⁸. In the text intense colours entrance and entrap Green's characters: Richard remembers being captivated as an adolescent by the 'deep violet and yellow' stained-glass windows of Tewkesbury Abbey (p.11); Christopher, intoxicated by the toy shop's magic lantern-like interior, reaches such 'a loch-deep unconsciousness of all else' that he allows Pye's sister to abduct him (p.12). Her eyes in turn are 'steeped' in an ocean of delusions, a world of ensnaring colour. She is repeatedly 'caught full by the light', or 'caught in another patch of colour' (p.14). Then there is the blacked-out city, awash in surreal and intoxicating colours. During the Blitz Richard comes upon a soldier and prostitute kissing in a surface shelter, framed against the kaleidoscopic destruction all around, turned 'motionless, forgotten, as though they had been drugged in order to forget' (p.97). The fire station is a blacked-out showroom full of 'shouting, gargantuan, mushroom pale firemen' (p.127) who spend their days 'under powerful electric lamps' (p.69). When Wal has his farewell party these arc lights create a dramatic *chiaroscuro* effect: 'one hundred watt shadow-carved faces' loom out of the darkness (p.68), and 'purple shadows' are 'hacked out beneath their eyebrows, chins and noses' by these 'naked, hot spotlights', set in an 'orange ceiling' (p.69). The men are transformed, laughing, into grotesque corpse-like caricatures: 'purple faces, with gaping throats fringed by green gaps for teeth, turned to each other, bellowing' (p.77).

Moonlight and black-out conditions have a strange effect on Green's characters. Pye's night-time experiences take place against a bizarre phantasmagoria. Under the 'intense impartiality of moonlight' (p.163) he is fatally reminded of the 'first girl he had known' (p.40) one moonlit night long ago in his youth (Pye admits to himself that 'this bloody black-out brought you in mind of it with the moon' (p.41)). Prudence's rejection of his advances catalyses his collapse: consumed by lust he

⁴⁸ Cf. Cunningham, who, noting how commonplace it was at this time to be 'acquisitive of cinematic effects', adds pointedly that while 'stealing ideas from the film world would certainly help dynamize' many writers, such strategies 'had been known to fiction at least since Zola, and devices for impressionistic jumpiness that the '30s tended fashionably to label "montage" had been developing gradually through the century' (*British Writers*, p.332). Green's own 'Mood', which likens Constance's memories to a 'flash-back in her mind' ('Mood', p.257), provides a good example of this modish use of film jargon.

becomes 'a drowned man walking' through a 'bounded sea of shadow', 'waving on the wet verge of drunkenness' (pp.167, 163). Into a night-time 'unreal depth of blue' (p.143) his adventures become ever more bizarrely coloured. He walks surrounded by 'triangular dark sapphire shadows' (p.162), under a 'milk moon' which strips 'deep gentian cracker paper shadows off his uniform', and uncovers 'gentian hooded doorways' (pp.163, 167). A policeman goes by 'bobbling the primrose torch'; a prostitute lounging in a doorway reveals a 'dark purple nipple, the moon full globe that was red Indian tinted by her bulb' (p.163). These reds and purples are the colours of passion, the colours of psychosis, and the colour of danger, the Blitz which looms, a 'red glow which spread' (p.48) over the texts. A 'flickering reddish light' (p.16) spills over Christopher's abduction; Amy's senses are like 'twining briars' (p.42), and Pye's present to her in the asylum is 'a comb with rose briars painted on the top' (p.87); Brid, Mrs Howells' mentally disturbed daughter, is conceived under the 'liquid rose flower light of a dying coal fire' (p.78). Green's wartime world is dark, destructive, luxuriantly sexual: sex provokes neurosis, contributing to the hallucinatory feel of wartime London.

The Blitz short stories are particularly revealing. 'The Old Lady', Green's third Blitz account, was written in 1943; and, extensively rewritten, would be incorporated in *Caught* later that year⁴⁹. Its first person narrator rewrites the Blitz as a curiously literary fantasia, explained because he has 'been reading *The Arabian Nights* at the fire station' (p.111), and starts to recite 'the story where, in the French edition, begins "It was holiday time in Damascus"' (p.114). 'Mr Jonas's' narrator, amidst the blaze and 'the extravagance by which this was displayed', idly wonders that 'it would have been possible to read in the reddish light' (pp.84, 83). Green fuses literary analogues with cinematic fantasia, drawing upon Stevenson's *The New Arabian Nights* (a London of the imagination, charting fantastic night-time adventures in familiar settings), the Baudelairean urban phantasmagoria or *cité plein des rêves*, and the *Thousand and One Nights* the narrator is apparently reading from, for inspiration. Gas mains burn in the street as 'though at the word of an angered ifrit' (p.111); the bombers above are drawn by the 'expanse of light, by a secret word to which they

⁴⁹ compare: 'He might have come from seeing the Princess Fatimah and the poet Murrakish' ('TOL', p.113) with 'He might have come from seeing a Prince and a Princess' (*Ca*, p.97), or the 'twin approaches to the Sultan's palace' ('TOL', p.111) with the 'twin approaches to a palace in a story' (*Ca*, p.95).

answered, the “creatures of King Nasr” (p.112); flares fall like ‘jewels that swayed down, white diamonds that barely dropped, offerings brilliant but aloof’, while ‘pink rocketing shell bursts all about’, and are compared to ‘stars the djinn had plucked down from heaven’ (p.113).

It is impossible to ignore the cinematic qualities of Green’s Blitz accounts. Parallels can also be drawn with Hollywood technicolour films, for fresh in the mind would have been two recently-released technicolour romances - *The Thief of Bagdad* in December 1940 and Universal’s version of the *Arabian Nights*, which came out in early 1943, slightly before ‘The Old Lady’ and *Caught*. Hollywood had seen the potential in exotic colour spectacles early on - the first real colour success, 1936’s *The Garden of Allah*, was similarly themed to capitalise on the perceived exoticism of the Orient⁵⁰. During the war many likened the sheer exuberance of the visual splendours of London under fire struck to the extraordinary world of colour movies. The immediately pre-war *Dodge City* (1939) depicted, in the eyes of one reviewer, an astonishing new world of outrageous colour, ‘putty-coloured faces, improbable reds, and some amazingly spurious greens’⁵¹. Another London critic, reviewing Disney’s *Fantasia* in the wake of the Blitz (it was released in August 1941), declared that the viewer ‘leaves dazed and debauched by the orgy of colour’⁵². Len Lye, one of the early pioneers of British colour film-making, noted in 1940 technicolour’s potential ‘uncontrolled galaxy of colours’, a ‘hotchpotch of discordant colour’⁵³. Blitz descriptions similarly ‘recolour the picture’, making it seem lurid and surreal - a colouring process which recalls *Pack My Bag*’s ‘overpainting’ and ‘retouching’ of the past to produce ‘an unreliable account of what used to be’ (p.8). To narrate is to go over everything, and going over things inevitably produces ‘favourable interpretations [...] which colour and falsify the account one gives’ (‘ANR’, p.139).

Blitz descriptions all too-easily veer into melodramatic, over literary or sub-cinematic performances, ever prone to collapse into cliché. Spender noted that the only member of his fire-fighting squad who could vividly describe his experiences

⁵⁰ *The Thief of Bagdad* (London Films; dir. Michael Powell, Ludwig Berger & Tim Phelan); *Arabian Nights* (Universal; dir. John Rawlins).

⁵¹ Unsigned, ‘The Movies’, *New Statesman and Nation* 18 (1939), p.309.

⁵² Unsigned, ‘An Occasional Londoner’s Diary’, *New Statesman and Nation* 22 (1941), pp.106-7 (106).

⁵³ ‘The Man Who Was Colourblind: An Example of Chromatic Continuities’, *Sight and Sound* 9 (1940), pp.6-7 (6).

was, paradoxically, illiterate: the ‘others had almost completely substituted descriptions which they read in the newspapers or heard on the wireless for their own impressions’, while he alone ‘had read no accounts of his experiences and so he could describe them vividly’ (*World within World*, pp.273-74). In *Caught* Richard, faced by the lurid reds, greens and yellows of the Blitz, or that ‘unreal depth of blue’ up above, is upset by his inability to do justice to the spectacle. As Oddvar Holmesland suggests, the ‘inability of ordinary narrative prose to convey the emotional impact’ of the Blitz forces Green’s characters and narration alike to fall back on cinematic analogies⁵⁴. Richard resorts to hackneyed visual metaphors, feeling how ‘extraordinary’ it is ““that one’s imagination is so literary””. He concludes that reality has become more cinematic than believable, since only films seem able to do justice to the spectacle:

“What will go on up there to-night in London, every night, is more like a film, or that’s what it seems like at the time. Then afterwards, when you go over it, everything seems unreal [...] as you begin building again to describe to yourself some experience you’ve had” (p.174).

The black-out is supra-visual; it makes Green’s characters feel ‘highly dramatic’ as they struggle with the inadequacy of words to describe the Blitz (p.83).

The collusion of wartime reality and cinematic fiction, of experiences ‘more like a film’, is a recurrent theme in other texts of the period. One of the several A. F. S. memoirs around the time of the Blitz noted how the ‘imagination goes dead [...] it cannot be true, the eyes must be witnessing a crazy cinema reel’⁵⁵. Keith Douglas’s splendid *Alamein to Zem Zem*, trying to convey the experience of travelling in a tank, likens the view to ‘that in a camera obscura or a silent film’, through which its crew could observe

that country into which we were now moving as an illimitably strange land, quite unrelated to real life, like the scenes in “The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari”⁵⁶.

While the protagonist of Alexander Baron’s post-war *From the City, from the*

⁵⁴ *A Critical Introduction to Henry Green’s Novels: The Living Vision* (London: Macmillan, 1986), p.75).

⁵⁵ Michael Wassey, *Ordeal by Fire: The Story and Lesson of Fire over Britain and the Battle of the Flames* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1941), p.83.

⁵⁶ *Alamein to Zem Zem* (London: E. P. L., 1946), p.19.

Plough, echoing *Caught*'s experiments in cinematic projection, describes landing on the shores of France in much the same fashion:

he felt free, triumphant, detached somehow from all that was happening around him; as if he were seeing it on a cinema screen, as if all the noises were on a sound-track [...] everything was so familiar. He had seen it all before, on newsreels, in war films [...] There was nothing new here⁵⁷.

Or Louis MacNeice in *The News-reel*, stating

Since Munich, what? A tangle of black film
Squirming like bait upon the floor of my mind
And scissors clicking daily⁵⁸.

Reality as private movie: Green too was to liken remembering the past in his autobiography to 'a movie, or a set of stills' (*PMB*, p.8).

Green's characters and narrators draw upon cinematic techniques to help them describe these unfamiliar colours and lighting effects: cinematic experience simply cannot be ignored. In 'A Rescue' Green and his fellow firemen, stumbling about in the dark of the Blitz, are likened to usherettes, seeing by 'the cinema light of our electric torches' (p.79). Tropes of projection recur: Richard converts his experiences into words by projecting his thoughts before him (he also notes, arriving back home on his first leave, the station's platform 'shining as ink, like a dark picture done on glass framed to screen electric light' (*Ca*, p.6)). Cinema, projecting shadows in the dark, anticipates the Blitz's world of darkness and shadow, strange colours and unorthodox light sources. The stained glass windows of the cathedral near Richard's country home, projecting 'deep violet and yellow Bible stories', or the store of the abduction, 'lit by stained glass windows in front of arc lamps which cast the violent colours of that glass over the goods laid out on counters' (p.11), both approximate cinematic projections.

Cinematic idiom, moreover, affects Green's cast and the way that they perceive their world. The most extreme example of this is Shiner Wright, stunned by a chance viewing of "King Kong," the film of an outsize in apes that was twenty foot tall', into adopting his own bizarre style of syntax: 'the experience had had a lasting effect

⁵⁷ *From the City, from the Plough* (London: Cape, 1948), p.139.

⁵⁸ in *Collected Poems 1925-1948* (London: Faber and Faber, 1949), pp.225-26.

on his adjectives. One in particular, “conga,” he used to cover almost anything’ (p.43). In Shiner’s world nothing, however extraordinary, cannot be translated into this private cinematic idiom. Mrs Howells also borrows from cinema’s fertile store of narrative devices. She imagines travelling to her son-in-law’s army camp as if playing a bit part in some fabulous Hollywood musical fantasia, picturing herself striding along a road while ‘Up in the sky giant silent trumpet searchlights swung like they were to herald angels’ (p.84). Her filmic delirium, in fact, suspiciously recalls the widely-seen 1940 Blitz documentary, the G.P.O. Film Unit’s *London Can Take It!*, in which a voice-over declared, over documentary Blitz footage:

“Now the searchlights are poking long white inquisitive fingers into the blackness of the night...These are not Hollywood sound effects... This is the music they play every night at London - the symphony of war”⁵⁹.

Here, in an effective reversal, the world of reality and the world of fantasy collide.

2.3.2 Imaginative stimuli

The unsettling atmosphere of wartime London further complemented Green’s sensitivity to the terrors of everyday existence. As we have seen, fatalism is altogether characteristic of *Pack My Bag*, which eloquently records Green’s very genuine sense of dread. However, the dreading was laced with fascination. Friends and acquaintances, for instance, remembered Green’s love of disastrous news: V. S. Pritchett talks of him taking a ‘wild delight in calamity’⁶⁰; just as Sebastian Yorke relates how ‘any setback, however slight, was a cause of intense and gleeful discussion about what worse horrors might ensue’ (‘Memoir’, p.295). Fire, that ‘moth’s suicide’ for firemen, as *Caught* puts it (p.48), is *Pack My Bag*’s trope for Green’s own fears of ‘imminent death, that rather ghastly colour in the sky of mustard yellows’ (p.207). In his autobiography Green talks of the required ‘threat to one’s skin to wake what is left’ (p.54). This is emblematic of Green’s art, quickened

⁵⁹ Harry Watt and Humphrey Jennings, dirs, (G. P. O. Film Unit, 1940), with commentary read by Quentin Reynolds.

⁶⁰ ‘In the Echo Chamber’, *New Statesman* 94 (1977), p.403.

during the war by an extraordinary mixture of threats and dangers. In similar fashion each of the wartime novels presents characters who find themselves strangely affected by wartime existence; like Pye, 'revitalised in a way that took him by surprise' (*Ca*, p.63). 'A Rescue' similarly captures the simultaneous euphoria and fear of life as a firemen during the Blitz:

as always when on the move in a bad raid, there was that added awareness, you sat forward, you waited for a bomb, for a crater not marked out with lamps, for wreckage, for glass to cut the tyres, for anything (p.78).

The danger is simultaneously terrifying and exhilarating: the menace also provides the necessary edge for the writer's art - for, as *Pack My Bag* suggests, our 'interest in what goes on about us has been sharpened by the fear of death' (p.185; Spender similarly suggested that the Blitz had 'at least heightened our sense of life'⁶¹).

Green's creative reanimation, therefore, coincides with the emergence of circumstances which accentuate instability: a world increasingly obstructed and arbitrarily menaced; characters whose fixations are brought into sharp focus by unusual pressures and stresses. His Londoners feel menaced and peculiarly helpless. Before the Blitz they are unnerved by the dark and by the inevitability of attack or invasion; and when the Blitz starts they feel, as William Sansom recorded, 'the impotence of not attacking, but being attacked'⁶². The menace is specifically *arbitrary*: Green's cast are non-combatants and can only take preventative measures; they are, quite literally, "caught" in a particularly passive situation. Fighting fires is to lose all sense of perspective amidst uncontrollable blazes; enemy aircraft are never glimpsed by the searchlights in the night sky (in *Caught* Richard, hearing two aircraft above, 'looked up. He expected a dogfight he would not see' (p.96)). There is just a 'steady [...] uninterrupted drone' overhead, from which the bombs as if at random: only the noise makes it 'all threatening' ('AR', p.77). A chandelier flare lights up the sky, floating 'swaying down like pearls on fire, dropped by magic': the agents responsible remain hidden from view, leaving this bombing cue to drift down 'with

⁶¹ 'Christmas Day at Station XIY', in H.S. Ingham, ed, *Fire and Water: An Anthology by Members of the N.F.S.* (London: Drummond, 1942), pp.176-87 (176).

⁶² *Westminster in War* (London: Faber and Faber, 1947), p.11. George Moore similarly wrote of his tube-dwellers that 'here was a group of people - having things done to them, and being absolutely helpless' (quoted in Stansky and Abrahams, p.35)

infinite ease, with the greatest menace' (*Ca*, p.96). The city's inhabitants are acutely sensitive to the mysterious threats which lurk in the surrounding gloom, morbidly thinking how it seems 'as if every doorway in London held someone looking at the night, the spread of death it was at present' (p.166).

Green uses his historical references (the evacuation of Dunkirk; the losses in Norway; the Blitz) carefully, situations which further hemmed Britain in just as his characters become more and more oppressed by this sensation of menace. When Pye walks in the darkened city with the evacuation at Dunkirk at the back of his mind, he again senses a 'menace in the streets'

such as had not oppressed him since the day war was declared. [...] In that deadly moonlight brothers were dying fast, and not so far off. A week's time and it might be anybody's turn (p.165).

Caught's night-time revellers think only of the present, the remaining 'weeks and even months of more nights still to live' before 'it might be they would have to be dug out of the heaped ruins' (p.108). For the

black-out was new to all [...] It stilled the loudest voice [...] by the menace in that highly polished sky which they felt might, at any moment, fall flat (pp.43-44).

The terrors of aerial warfare and bombardment, fresh in the mind after the Spanish Civil War, certainly influenced 1939's *Party Going*, in which Green's narrator indulges, as it were, in simulated bombing-runs on his cast (that dead pigeon which unerringly drops at Miss Fellowes' feet, the anonymous bystander who wonders ominously "what targets for a bomb" these helpless civilians all are (p.178)). The fatalistic narrator of 'The Old Lady' claims to 'know the point at which I must expect a bomb from a plane, the fatal angle, within about ten degrees' (p.112). In *Back* Mrs Frazier, dwelling on the arbitrariness of the doodlebugs, darkly warns Charley to

"take what pleasure and comfort you can, because who is there to tell what may befall. When these new bombs he's sending over, turn in the air overhead, and come at you, there's not a sound to be had. One minute sitting in the light, and the next in pitch darkness with the ceiling down, that is if you're lucky, and haven't the roof and all on top" (p.31).

2.3.3 Psychological catalysts

Just after war was declared David Gascoyne recorded vividly

A reign as of suspense within suspense:
Outside our area of sand-bagged mansions and of tense
But inarticulate expectancy of roars⁶³.

Green's blacked-out city is a strange place of fears and dreads, fraught with unavoidable dangers. He depicts a menacing nocturnal world in which mental disorders breed (and he would later refer to the 'hallucinations which fed on me' during the war-years ('SG', p.8)). The atmosphere of *Caught* and the short stories is foreboding, a world of 'suspense within suspense', and Green's characters typically feel unsettled, ill at ease. Both the black-out conditions and the Blitz exaggerate and bring out into the open their hidden compulsions and obsessions. Its unnatural blackness is oppressive; a time when, as one wartime psychologist suggested, 'phantasies obtrude most powerfully'⁶⁴. Such themes were also much debated at the time by psychologists. Grinker and Spiegel wrote in 1945 that war, like a 'crucial experience [...] exposes the underlying physiological and psychological mechanisms of the human being'⁶⁵. Another psychological analysis of Blitz conditions concluded that

anxieties gain much of their intensity from the unconscious patterns to which everyday events are continuously being assimilated [...] There remains a diffuse dread, as if something disastrous has not yet quite happened but still hangs over us, something that we cannot define or locate. Our everyday worries are just an earnest of the catastrophe that lies in wait (D. W. Harding)⁶⁶.

The darkness exerts psychological pressure on Green's characters, and the strangeness of the situation intensifies and distorts their memories. Not only do they recollect wrongly, but what they remember exercises a fatal influence on the present. Twisted and transformed, memories are at once more vivid, but also much more unreliable - a phenomenon Green calls 'misremembering' (borrowing from *Pack My*

⁶³ 'An Autumn Park', *Poems 1937-1942* (London: E. P. L., 1943), p.50.

⁶⁴ W. R. Bion, 'The "War of Nerves": Civilian Reaction, Morale and Prophylaxis', in *The Neuroses in War*, ed. by Emanuel Miller (London: Allen & Unwin, 1940), pp.180-200 (190).

⁶⁵ *Men Under Stress*, (London: Churchill, 1945), p. vii.

⁶⁶ *The Impulse to Dominate* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1941), pp.108-9.

Bag's exaggerated problems with memory-recall). This process alternately fascinates and horrifies the characters in *Caught*. Pye feels initially 'revitalised in a way that took him by surprise', while Richard becomes 'increasingly absorbed by what was left to him of the sights and sounds' of the past (p.63). But in this strange darkness memory can no longer be controlled: as Pye realizes, "there's no one can put a halter on his thoughts" (p.156). "I don't seem able to 'elp myself" (p.160), Pye adds; thinking of Brid, Mrs Howells admits that she "don't seem able to keep 'er out of me mind" (p.57). Remembering or thinking are, in the stress of war and black-out, obsessional activities, and both Pye and Roe are prone to repeated fits "of rememberin' back" (p.166).

Crime, neurosis, and mysterious threats menace characters who live in perpetual fear and dread of the real and imagined terrors that thrive in the blacked-out city. They are helplessly sucked in by the 'danger [...] in this lull of living' (p.122). Living among the cracks and fissures, Green suggests, is a dangerous game for one and all: war brings terror openly onto the darkened city streets. Richard has no inkling of 'the insecurity the war would put him in' (p.32), but even he feels straight away 'in the air, the menace of what was yet to be experienced, the beginning', noting ominously that even the barrage balloons above are the 'colour of the blade of a knife' (p.37). Pye, as we have seen, is oppressed by this hostile night-time city, and staggers through the 'the vast, moonlit night' like a 'drowned man walking'; alienated, 'alone with his bad thoughts', and 'suckling on an ulcer the sickly, sore-covered infant of his fears' (pp.166-69).

Mental disorders accordingly proliferate under such unnatural conditions. The terrors of the night, a repeated theme in Green's pre-war texts (cf. the menace of the fog-bound station; the horror that blindness represents; the terror of Lily's elopement) come alive in the menacing 'whirling dark' which lies beyond the railway carriage window on Richard's first period of leave (*Ca*, p.11), while Amy's insanity dwells in a 'dark hole between firelit fingers over a dark face' (p.16). Amnesia and psychotic behaviour, literal personality "black-outs", are the parallel psychological states to the city under black-out, a fate much dreaded by Green's characters (and the novels contain repeated warnings on this theme⁶⁷). Amnesia is particularly important in

⁶⁷ "The man who loses his mental faculties is the one to get left. What's left of him will be his axe and spanner, and the buckle of his belt" (Pye's firefighting lecture, *Ca*, p.22); "Watch yerself, mate,

Back, where memory loss repeatedly descends, without warning, on Green's characters; a state of affairs - the Grants' family doctor suggests it comes "from the bombing", making amnesia nature's own "blackout over what she doesn't want remembered" (p.158). Amnesia evades hostile realities: there are "compensations in not remembering" (p.34), and the doctor confides that he has "a number of cases like that, now" (p.157).

2.4 IMAGES OF CLAUSTROPHOBIA AND ENCLOSURE

2.4.1 The nocturnal world

Green's war texts, so obsessed by the play of colour, darkness and restricted lighting, are creatively drawn to the claustrophobic aspects of life during black-out. By the time of the Blitz only three million people were left in London, leaving the city increasingly deserted; its inhabitants by night underground, or employed in the home services. Osbert Sitwell, also noting the 'strange revelations of perspective', wrote of the city by night as 'a secret, apparently deserted, hive of darkened streets [...] People hurry down the streets as if they were haunted'⁶⁸. Most of the significant action of *Caught* takes place in the dark; either at night, or days spent below ground under artificial lights: daylight is largely banished from a nocturnal and subterranean London, and we rarely glimpse the city by day. Pye's 'deadly moonlight' (the phrase, given *Caught*'s obsessive cinematic references, undoubtedly an allusion to the romantic wartime movie, *Dangerous Moonlight*) infuses *Caught* with menace. Moonlight, the 'bombers moon', similarly fascinated artists:

Sutherland said it gave the feeling of 'being on the brink of some drama' [...] The new moonlit ruins began to remind critics of de Chirico's disquietingly deserted vistas, but London was made doubly surreal by the weird effects of bomb-blast [...] The sinister moon began to appear in Piper's black skies; Sutherland's flimsy terraces lay open to its pallid light; and Nash's iron sea in *Totes Meer* rolled

you'll be goin' pickin' violets off of stones before you're finished, stone bonk, you will" (Shiner with Piper, *Ca*, p.150); "once you begin to lose the picture of this or the other in your mind's eye, it's hard to determine where things'll stop [...] I knew a man once [...] who started to misremember in that fashion. Wasn't long before [...] they had to shut him away" (Mr Grant, *Ba*, p.14).

⁶⁸ *Sing High! Sing Low!* (London: Macmillan, 1944), pp.166, 165.

in beneath it (Malcolm Yorke)⁶⁹.

Green repeatedly dwells upon 'the grandeur, the remoteness of anything that is highly polished', this concentration of atmosphere which elsewhere he described as 'more than moonlight' ('AR', p.77), a 'moonlight such as no town-dweller had seen except on honeymoon' (*Ca*, p.43). As in de Chirico's nocturnal vistas, or Ernst's petrified, moonlit cities, the 'moon, fixed in the sky without a cloud, flood[s] everything with intolerance' (p.165).

A very similar feeling would be captured in Graham Sutherland's wartime London sketches. Sutherland, Roberto Tassi suggests, also depicts an 'entirely nocturnal experience' along streets 'haunted by gloom'; 'a long journey through darkness'⁷⁰. This same feeling for the dark dominates *Caught*, which depicts an urban 'nocturnal experience': daylight seems altogether unreal and inappropriate, as surreal as the winter snow amidst brilliant sunshine that the blinking firemen stumble out into. While Richard's trips to the countryside are perfectly normal by day the city, by contrast, seems gripped in a perpetual darkness: daytime London literally *feels* wrong. Its inhabitants, preoccupied with this darkness, obsessively contextualize their experience under black-out conditions. When Pye mentally prepares himself for his trip to the asylum he instinctively imagines it will take place during the black-out: he 'thought of it as by night, for the black-out, at that period, was at the back of all their minds' (p.84). He is accordingly disorientated when he travels by day, so accustomed is he to the twilight world of 'gentian hidden doorways' and a 'bounded sea of shadow' of London existence (p.167). Richard, returning to his country home on leaves, finds similar difficulty in changing his diurnal existence - by day below ground in the sub-station, by night in the black-out - to one of daylight normality. Green's preface suggests that 'only 1940 in London is real', although quite how to define that reality, amidst the phantasmagoria and the daytime air of unreality, remains problematic (Virginia Woolf wondered just what was 'meant by "reality"? It would seem to be something very erratic, very undependable'⁷¹; Richard, remembering the first night of the Blitz, feels 'hot with the breath of his first night in

⁶⁹ *The Spirit of Place: Nine Neo-Romantic Artists and Their Times* (London: Constable, 1988), p.152.

⁷⁰ *Sutherland: The Wartime Drawings* (London: Sotheby Parke Bernet, 1980), p.11.

⁷¹ *A Room of One's Own* (London: Hogarth Press, 1929), p.165

real London' (*Ca*, p.184, my emphases)). Other writers also noted the strangeness of Blitz life. Edith Sitwell's poem 'Street Song' embraces the dark rather than the light, declaiming 'Come like the night, for terrible is the sun | As truth'⁷². So too for the novelist: the immediate post-Dunkirk mood struck Eric Knight as deeply surreal:

when daylight came, it always seemed fantastic and impossible [...] the Air Raid Precautions people, the local Defence Volunteers, the auxiliary firemen - they looked like silly badged and armletted and dressed-up figures left over from last night's puppet show [...] It was all ludicrous in the sunshine [...] Only at night some people began to feel something. In the blackness they began to feel war, real war, edging nearer and nearer⁷³.

And Elisabeth Bowen was to write that 'as the singed dust settled and smoke diluted you felt more and more called upon to observe the daytime as a pure and curious holiday from fear'⁷⁴.

2.4.2 The wartime *nocturne*

Green's version of the black-out conjures up a strange new world in which inanimate objects and buildings, looming menacingly out of the gloom, suddenly seem unfamiliar and curiously threatening. The firemen of the Blitz short stories journey along darkened streets lined with buildings which stand dimly in the murky background, 'an unsubstantial glow beyond [their] hooded headlamps' ('AR', p.78). His London is a deserted, unrecognisable urban graveyard: the dome of St. Paul's, so emblematic in photographs and accounts of the period, never appears on the skyline, no specific areas are mentioned by name. Even the destruction seems curiously anonymous, while Green's firefighters seem moreover to work in an eerie vacuum. In this hermetic world individual actions have little discernible impact on the flames, and take place against a background of apparent civilian indifference. Few of the non-combatants glimpsed are either grateful or interested ('Mr Jonas', 'The Old Lady'); others are plainly insulting (the bystanders in *Caught*). The firemen of 'The Old Lady' (in a description which *Caught* retains) suddenly come, amidst scenes of

⁷² *Street Songs* (London: Macmillan, 1942), p.7.

⁷³ *This Above All* (London: Cassell, 1941), p.49.

⁷⁴ *The Heat of the Day* (London: Cape, 1949), p.85

devastation, upon a statue: 'against a livid light, an incandescence of white hot lemon, this old pitch-black warhorse stood, his bronze rider up' (p.112). This monumental statue, standing strangely alone amidst the desolation, is deeply emblematic, reminiscent of the inert deserted landscapes de Chirico's early paintings, filled with mysterious shadows or statues conveying a sense of menace and emptiness. *Caught*'s narrative records linear perspectives of Blitz-created desolation:

Two great streets converged ahead at a sharp angle, and he could see up both because the gas mains had been set alight. Two thirty-foot high sprays or fans of flame lit the face of ornate hotel buildings, or what may have been the east and west sides of a vast block of flats [...] these streets [...] might have been twin approaches to a palace in a story (p.95)⁷⁵.

The city's topography is instead typically threatening. Richard waits on the first day of mobilisation

mute in a vast asphalted space. The store towered above, pile after dark pile which, gradually, light after light went darker than the night that was falling and which he dreaded (p.37).

Pye similarly imagines the asylum to be 'a vast pile that was raised black against him', a 'tiered tomb which shut those inside from the sky' (p.85).

'A Rescue' notes the strange inversions of the Blitz, in which paradoxically the city is dead but the heavens are alive while the city's population is underground: 'On the ground everything seemed entirely deserted, dead, but the sky was alive still' (p.78). In the newly blacked-out city Green depicts a new, troglodytic nocturnal world. In a dramatic reverse, the death-bringing sky holds life, while the living below seem dead. The non-Service inhabitants of London are all themselves "buried"; in basements of buildings, clustered in tube stations, hidden away in surface or underground shelters from this funereal blackness, 'more than night, a forgetting, a death of black' ('MJ', p.87). Ilse, lying nude in Prudence's flat during the black-out, resembles in the 'declining light' some pallid inhabitant of a nocturnal underworld, 'dim, like a worm with a thin skeleton [...] rasher thin' (p.142). Green's 'mushroom pale' firemen belong to the same night-time world: as the narrator of 'Mr Jonas'

⁷⁵ cf. Sutherland, discussing his *Devastation* series of Blitz sketches: "I became tremendously interested in parts of the East End where the shells of long terraces of houses remained [...] great - surprisingly wide - perspectives of destruction seeming to recede into infinity [...] the windowless blocks were like sightless eyes" (quoted by Tassi, p.19).

fancifully states, 'Some living things turn to the light, we went by instinct into the deepest dark' (p.85).

2.4.3 Blitz enclosures

Well before the Blitz Green's characters repeatedly find themselves in situations which enclose and entrap. Lily and Bert capitulate to the urban menace of the city in *Living; Party Going*'s mysteriously fog-bound railway station is further subdivided within by the steel shutters which seal those in the hotel off from the others waiting in the forecourt. Interiors are generally stifling, from the cramped houses in *Living*, to the diminished vistas of his blinded protagonists. John Haye sees himself 'shut up in the traditional living tomb' (*Bl*, p.56), noting bleakly that 'window shut, window open, you were boxed up just the same' (p.246). His precursor, the blind protagonist of 'Adventure in a Room' is trapped in a world 'so very small, it did not go beyond the confines of his room' ('Adventure', p.12)). Green's own memories of boarding schools and university in *Pack My Bag*, as Chapter one has demonstrated, are prototypical experiences of imprisonment. His protagonists are imprisoned by their faulty senses (walls of deafness, walls of blindness), incarcerated in occupations (in the case of *Living*, with its tale of 'coffin shaped lumps of metal' in the foundry, quite literally so (p.252)), trapped by circumstance or location. Virginia Woolf's final novel, *Between the Acts* (1941) - perhaps the 'most powerful fictional imaging of the destructive element as prison' in the 1930s (Cunningham, p.79) - diagnoses the listlessness of a generation: 'They were all caught and caged; prisoners, watching a spectacle'⁷⁶. Like Green's party-goers, everyone is headed helplessly for disaster, stranded and waiting for disaster to arrive, 'alone, frightened, sickened, sure of dying' ('BGF', p.279).

So too do Green's characters find themselves repeatedly trapped, either enclosed in confined places, or caught up in situations they cannot control or influence. Both 'A Rescue' and 'Mr Jonas' offer particularly stark parables about imprisonment. In the former Green's unit is called to help an unfortunate civilian who is 'grotesquely

⁷⁶ *Between the Acts* (London: Hogarth Press, 1941), p.205; in *Pack My Bag* Green, 'caught up' in events, acquiesces 'in this absolute bewilderment of July 1939' (pp.235-36).

caught up' ('AR', p.79), having fallen down a sewer manhole. It gets worse, for having successfully tied the line to pull the injured man "out of this bloody 'ole'", the rescuer is in turn trapped. Green writes that "I had no hold on anything, dare not touch the cover, had my back wedged into a corner with one foot at right angles to the other. I was stuck" (p.81). The narrator describes how this 'mid-air tomb looked very bleak, there was no room to move, and the idea of the cramped climb down to him was not attractive' (p.80). Much the same situation recurs in 'Mr Jonas', another dramatized fire-fighting rescue. Here the firemen discover another man, once again 'trapped at the bottom of a small jagged hole' (p.87). He discovers, however, that this hole is, nevertheless, much 'deeper than I had thought', and is moreover veiled by a 'rising well of smoke and steam' (p.88). In each story the sensation of being buried alive metaphorically duplicates the entombing quality of the Blitz. 'Mr Jonas's' second Rescue Squad can be observed 'silently getting into the escape shaft of a basement shelter, climbing one by one into the earth, as it might be into the lower chamber of a tomb', walking along 'planes of shattered tombs' surrounded by 'a vault quiet' (p.86).

Similar images of entombment recur in the war art of Sutherland and Henry Moore. Sutherland's Blitz sketches and later furnace paintings capture a stygian, surprisingly sinister world; Moore's 1941 tube-shelter drawings a subterranean universe of huddled forms. Sutherland, sent after drawing the Blitz to the tin-mines of Cornwall, scribbled on the margin of one of his sketches, *Tin Mine: Miner Emerging from a Slope* (1942) 'very strong feeling of shut-in-ness' (Tassi, p.102). In *Caught* London is a frightening twilight world, in which the sensation of entrapment is inescapable; the novel's very title 'could not have been more succinctly indicative of his recurring nightmare' of entrapment (Cunningham, p.77). The principal room of *Caught's* sub-station, where the firemen spend the majority of the Phoney War waiting, is a converted showroom, artificially blacked out to the outside, then re-lit with an unearthly glare by those powerful arc lamps:

During black-out hours it was impossible to have any ventilation. They were not allowed to turn down the radiators because a General Order had been circulated which drew attention to the danger of burst pipes. All day long they spent under powerful electric lamps, however brilliantly the sun might shine on snow laid over gardens across the way.

Exacerbating the suffocating heat and claustrophobic atmosphere is another ironic prohibition, forbidding them to open the doors for their own safety, 'for fear the public might be led to protest at their idleness' (p.69). This, of course, further augments the feeling of claustrophobia for men who have been, 'On and off [...] months indoors' (p.125), in their very own artificial daytime black-out. Reinforcing the idea of imprisonment and burial we learn that in 'white paint over the black, life-sized skeletons had been drawn on the showroom windows' (p.69). They carry this feeling out of the sub-station: Pye can only imagine the asylum like a 'tiered tomb', and it is stressed that the 'black-out, new to all, was of a vault' (p.38). The men start to look like living corpses, their shoes 'coated with white dust from the artificial marble floor' (p.125), and their faces 'dead white' from the lack of sun (p.44). The narrative describes the 'phantasmal antics' of the drunken firemen, watched in turn by their fellow off-duty Auxiliaries, swathed in blankets like mummies and peering out of them 'as though about to rise from the dead' (p.44). Even the pub in which they drink after hours is no less claustrophobic: a 'saloon bar into which no outside air penetrated' (p.48).

2.4.4 Lulls and entrapment in *Loving* and *Back*

Each of Green's war novels offers curiously similar enclosures to the others: the blacked-out, blitzed city in *Caught*, and the stranded enclosures in the countryside - the isolated castle of *Loving*, Charley's European prison-camp in *Back*. In *Caught* reality is menaced and endangered by the Blitz; *Loving* and *Back*, on the other hand, convey the impotence and strain of the post-Blitz 'lull', which creates different kinds of entrapment. London's experience of the war divided into four sections: the 'Phoney' War between September 1939 and August 1940, the Blitz until May 1941, then a two year intermission before occasional bombing raids now augmented by the new pilot-less rocket attacks. This period of intermission was quickly dubbed "The Lull", and Green's similarly-titled short story also plays upon silences, pauses, lulls in conversation, tired repetitions and failed stories. This period, as Michael North points out, equally fascinated Green, who was no less drawn to the 'slack times around convulsions', the lulls separating brief moments of action which create

tension with no outlet, save in 'surrogates for action' (North, p.102). Green, agile as ever, found this atmosphere of stagnancy and malaise, stripped of the pressing danger, post-1941, of invasion and with bombing a thing of the past, and the land offensive in mainland Europe still a long way off, no less compelling than the extremities of the Blitz. Elizabeth Bowen wrote of a time in which all activity seems to have been suspended, an oppressive calm said to resemble a 'tideless, hypnotic, futureless day-to-day' (*Heat of the Day*, p.95). 'The Lull's' firemen, inactive once more, gloomily talk in order to 'justify the waiting life they lived at present, without fires' ('Lull', p.104). Green himself described his time in the A. F. S. as one long series of alternations between extremes, from 'slack times' to 'convulsions'; 'sometimes in great danger, more often waiting in acute boredom' ('BGF', p.260). *Caught* documents the pre-Blitz inertia of months of 'war and no raids, that is of anticlimax' (p.5), a time of apparently 'fruitless waiting' (p.7). His firemen accordingly find 'the strain of waiting for raids prodigious' (p.24) - one elsewhere worries that "'if he doesn't put [a blitz] on soon we shall all be crackers'" ('Lull', p.109).

Loving and *Back* are further studies in imprisonment. Kinalty is as unnaturally becalmed as Charley Summers' prison camp (a prototypical hermetic enclosure, equally full of Englishmen stranded abroad). The "castle" is cut off culturally, geographically, and politically from the outside world; an insular and agoraphobic environment no less hermetic and claustrophobic than *Caught's* substation. Its servants try to shut out all news of the war across the water (of which they are fantastically ignorant), and entertain preposterous fears of the "'priest-ridden'" Irish (p.227). Whatever lies immediately beyond the confines of the house is a mystery to them. The servants dread the alien 'tumble down country outside' (p.29), preferring instead to pretend that they are alone in this "'desert of a place'" (p.188). Their neurotic fear of the outside world makes them dread leaving the immediate safety of the house and its grounds. The house, on the other hand, is not only described in excessive topographic detail but also carefully demarcated into individual spatial zones. Green's characters, who are preoccupied with hiding or locking their possessions up, appropriate their own individual spaces and territorially guard these inhabited zones. Spaces are either personalized or designated neutral (passages, the servants' dining room, the rooms of their superiors), creating zones which separate

their personal fiefdoms. Even the smallest of spaces in Kinalty are jealously guarded, from Aggie's 'bit of a cupboard' to the various individual territories or "kingdoms" of the servants. Charley calls his new quarters the 'strongroom'; Mrs Welch claims she "daren't abandon this kitchen day or night, not till I go to me bed when day is done that is and then I double lock the door. On guard I am" (p.167). Miss Burch, the housekeeper, eagerly envies Nanny Swift's nursery or Mrs Welch's kitchen, because they have "both of you a place you can call your own. Not like me with no more than a door opening into the sink and a bit of a cupboard" (p.121). Kinalty's servants obsessively confuse physical spaces and mental spaces so that, when threatened, they retreat to the private zones of their rooms. Bedrooms represent private space: Green's characters retire to them like cells, sickbeds from which they never again emerge, or conversely barricade themselves in (a typically psychotic exploration of space: Paddy locks himself in a 'bin' with his peacocks; in *Concluding* Adams hides away in a shed made of old doors). In their insecurity following Mike Mathewson's threatening visit, the servants further enforce their isolation, barring the estate gates; Green uses a similar analogy in *Concluding*'s similar great house, which is also surrounded by a wall as much designed to keep its inhabitants in by defining the boundaries of their world as to keep outsiders out.

Back's claustrophobia is of a different kind. Charley Summers, released after having spent his war in a German prison-camp, returns to London during the 'lull' of 1944. Charley is constantly reminded of the reality of this internment camp, disembarking from the bus in the opening scene as if 'watching for a trap' (p.5), or feeling 'back in a trap' with Nancy (p.87). While he tries to suppress his memories of the camp, one detail he does recall is that he kept a mouse out there, "in a cage I made" (p.199) - as emblematic an image of captivity within captivity as the metaphor of helpless entrapment Charley uses, thinking about Mr. Grant's death, 'in his self pity seeing himself again with his hands, like a monkey's, hung up on the barbed wire which had confined him within the camp' (p.179).

2.4.5 Contemporary directions

Loving's Charley Raunce and *Back*'s Charley Summers frequently feel nauseous.

Every time Raunce strays beyond the house he feels sick: “‘I’ve come over queer’”, he complains to Edith, “‘It’s coming away in the air ’as done it’” (p.94). He starts to look ‘very ill’ following this excursion, repeatedly vomiting. “‘I can’t go on the way I am. I’m in bad shape’”, he declares (p.215). This nausea is curiously shared by the other Charley, who repeatedly reacts with ‘rising, nauseating misery’ (p.116) to a wartime Britain which he no longer recognises. In emotional situations he starts to feel sick, facing Nancy ‘through his nausea’ (p.71); or, talking about her to Middlewitch, when again ‘the upset [...] began once more in his stomach’ (p.198). His neurosis appears to be grounded in memories of ‘something in France which he knew, as he valued his reason, that he must always shut out’, and he feels sick ‘in his stomach whenever prison camps were mentioned’ (p.18).

This nausea has interesting parallels with existential philosophy: nausea being, famously, Sartre’s metaphor for the spiritual ailments of the post-war world, an essentially indefinable anguish of being - grounded, like Charley Summers’ prison-camp, or Charley Raunce’s claustrophobic world of Kinalty Castle, in a metaphorical enclosure (*Caught*’s overheating sealed showroom under perpetual artificial light, for example, strangely anticipates the room in Sartre’s emblematic parable from 1945, *Huis Clos*, in which a handful of characters discover that they are stuck in a hot, bricked up room with no windows, and no way out).

Existentialism offers a similarly pessimistic vision foregrounded in the *zeitgeist* of war-torn Europe - Heidegger’s ‘Dread which reveals Nothing’, or Kierkegaard’s *Concept of Dread* (first published in London during 1944) would offer newly fashionable analogues for the same sense of listlessness and pervasive foreboding that Green’s world also conveys. The philosophy certainly struck a chord with a contemporary audience, which easily identified with what seemed a ready-made wartime vocabulary, of catchy topical references to the ‘yawning abyss’ or a ‘precipice’, and those emblematic key words, ‘dread’, ‘fate’, and ‘fear’⁷⁷. Dreading is very much an activity in *Caught*, whose characters are menaced by ‘great thrusts of dread’ (*Ca*, p.31) - hard pushed, however, to explain just what it is that they are dreading. As *Loving* suggests, everyone is ‘afraid of something or other’ (p.206).

⁷⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Existence and Being*, trans. by R.F.C. Hull and Alan Crick (London: Vision Press, 1949); Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Dread*, trans. by Walter Lowrie (London: Milford, 1944).

These dreads proliferate, transforming imaginary threats and unspecified, unaccountable fears into a pervasive sense of foreboding. Menace thrives on uncertainty: 'so much of what you did not know [is] threatening' (*PMB*, p.37). *Back* offers a particularly fertile example of cross-referencing, borrowing existentialist language and themes, with one eye fixed on the cinema. The novel displays interesting similarities with the movies now known as *films noirs*, many of whose themes - investigating the past (Rose's death); questions of identity; veteran-psychosis; restricted visual effects; the psychological disorders of amnesia and black-outs - it shares⁷⁸. Charley, symbolically disabled and newly released from prison somewhere 'on the other side' (p.5), returns to an unfamiliar and disorientating civilian world. The disillusioned returning veteran was a theme taken up in several *films noirs* that year: Charley himself feels an alienating 'day to day sense of being injured by everyone, by life itself' (p.131)⁷⁹. He repeatedly gets 'so that he did not know what he was about' (p.57), and his bewilderment over Rose blossoms into genuine paranoia, as he becomes 'more and more sure this whole thing was a plot' (p.112). Such fears are typically *noirish*: the hero of *The Dark Corner* similarly declares: "I feel all dead inside. I'm backed up in a dark corner, and I don't know who's hitting me"; Chandler's Marlowe states, in 1944's *Murder, My Sweet*, that "I don't know which side anybody is on. I don't even know who is playing". Like these *noir* heroes, Charley too feels 'betrayed on every side' (p.106), at the mercy of a menacing world and unable to rid himself of the conviction that things have gone horribly wrong.

The work Green produced during the war is, therefore, extremely flexible; sensitive to the slightest nuances of change, and imaginatively drawn to the unstable

⁷⁸ The term "film noir" was coined in 1946, thematically grouping together a variety of films made during the war and in the period immediately after; which, although made by disparate studios with a wide variety of actors and directors, are united by a sense of persistent malaise. Robert G. Porfirio suggests that the *film noir* typically presents 'a disorientated individual facing a confused world that he cannot accept. [...] Its negative side, the side to which its literary exponents are most closely drawn, emphasized life's meaninglessness and man's alienation; its catchwords include 'nothingness', 'sickness', 'loneliness', 'dread', 'nausea'. The special affinity of the *film noir* for this aspect of existentialism is nowhere better evidenced than in a random sampling of some of its most suggestive titles: *Cornered*, *One Way Street*, *No Way Out*, *Caged*, *The Dark Corner*, *In a Lonely Place*' ('No Way Out: Existential Motifs in the *film noir*', *Sight and Sound* 45 (1976), pp.212-17 (217)). Note how Green's own title "Caught" might indeed have been drawn at random from such a list.

⁷⁹ Edgar G. Ulmer, dir., *Detour* (P.R.C., 1945); George Marshall, dir., *The Blue Dahlia* (Paramount, 1946); Jean Negulesco, dir., *Nobody Lives Forever* (Warner, 1946), Joseph L. Mankiewicz, dir., *Somewhere in the Night* (T. C. F., 1946).

in various manifestations - the fragmentation of phenomena, heightened visual stimuli, mental stresses and strains, and social juxtaposition. The war effectively catalyses the unstable vision, the implicit convergence examined above between Green's wartime enclosures and the existential universe demonstrating his progression towards the increasingly phenomenological approach eventually adopted in *Nothing* and *Doting*.

3 EPISTEMOLOGICAL DISTRUST: LANGUAGE, NARRATIVE, AND VOICE

3.1 INTRODUCTION

I propose to focus in the first half of the chapter on Green's use of language. Narratives in Green's fiction are rarely straightforward; impeded by incomprehension, faulty senses, and, significantly, by language itself. Green, this chapter argues, progressively questions the capacity of language to signify. The unstable vision subtly transforms his modernist credentials - interest in the nature of the printed symbol, the effectiveness of transcribing the spoken word, in language itself - into an overriding scepticism of language and its powers of signification, charting a trajectory of distrust which eventually leads to the abstract and estranged textual world of *Nothing* and *Doting*.

Starting with problems of communication, and particularly of communication in *print*, we shall be looking at Green's sensitivity to signs, symbols, and semiotic issues throughout the fiction and theory, culminating in a detailed examination of *Back*, a pivotal text in the unstable vision which influences the subsequent acceleration of Green's representative scepticism. The novel centres on a mentally disturbed protagonist who inhabits a world of pure sign; his difficulties with interpretation symbolic of Green's own developing suspicions.

Secondly, we shall be looking at Green's stylistic deviations, examining linguistic peculiarities in his novels, where language is ever prone to deviation, deletion, substitution and disconnection. His avowed intention to 'rechallenge the reader's conscious imagination' ('ENF', p.22) sits with a more polemic desire to tamper with accepted usage and 'short-circuit' communication.

The second half of this chapter examines the status of narrative in Green's fiction in the light of his linguistic practice, looking at the ways in which the narrating instance is implicated in the narrative it conveys (the Genettian category of 'voice'), and how authoritative the narrative act is in his novels. We shall be considering questions of attribution and voice - deliberately indeterminate zones in Green's fiction - and how Green uses these to explore the nature of the narrative act. The

chapter analyses his peculiarly inconsistent narratives, where no

authorial attitude pervades or governs any of the novels. Instead, a given authorial attitude becomes one of a number of elements (including very different attitudes) which surface periodically and almost incidentally in the text (Gibson, *RND*, p.130).

Green's textual idioms are unusually diverse: not only do narrational idiom and narrational attitude fluctuate considerably within any given novel, but also markedly so from text to text. There is no standard narrative mode in Green's work, only a series of randomly occupied interpretative positions.

Finally, the chapter takes the findings regarding the status of voice and attribution in Green's fiction and assesses how authoritative the narrative act is in his novels. This, I argue, is characteristically unstable: Green's narrating agencies rarely wield authority consistently, and this furthermore progressively diminishes in his work as a whole, as those clear if erratic signs of narrative authority -- omniscience, access, confidence to narrate or describe - in the earlier novels slowly disappear from the fiction. The end result of this process is Green's final fiction: externally narrated texts which fatally lack authority and doubt language itself.

I also propose to examine the ways in which Green's narratives repeatedly cede authority; from the various inserted texts which replace narrational diegesis, to the readily incorporated idioms and voices of the narrative. Amidst this endemic structural instability assertions of authority, when they do appear, are almost always parodic, mocking the possibility of ever being authoritative. The various self-referential poses, sudden interventions and fleeting corrections all intimate an omniscience elsewhere absent. Levels of authority are always unstable in Green's work and, as I hope to demonstrate in chapter five, eventually lead towards the extreme positions of *Nothing* and *Doting* - texts in which narration is curtailed and restricted by self-imposed strictures.

3.2 PROBLEMS WITH LANGUAGE

3.2.1 The struggle to narrate

The narrative act is never straightforward in Green's fiction. His characters typically struggle to narrate, hindered by the incomprehension and disinterest of their listeners as much as by the intractability of language itself, that 'series of sound symbols'. Conversation in the novels is a dizzying venture fraught with wilful misinterpretations (characters who refuse to listen), inadvertent misunderstandings (characters who speak different idioms, symbolized by the repeated cultural misunderstandings of the fiction), communicational disasters (characters who find themselves unable to convert experience into language, or find that what they say is not what they mean); and further complicated by physical impediments, such as deafness and illness. Green's fiction displays an unusual degree of communicational disorder: his devious recorded dialogues and problematic narrative acts uncover the limitations of language. His characters struggle to make themselves understood, yet their dialogues, as Robert Phelps points out, are frequently suspiciously one-way:

unlike the conversation in ordinary novels, which moves neatly and coherently ahead, Green's often stands still, or blurs, because the people who speak so rarely understand, much less acknowledge, what is in turn being said to them. Almost invariably, there is some loss, some ambiguity, which then breeds the suspicion, fear, and aloneness in which most people live¹.

Green's characters tend to be preoccupied with their own thoughts, and only interested in what they themselves have to say (a good example of this are *Party Going*'s Claire and Evelyn, who incessantly talk but do 'not listen to each other, they were so anxious to explain' (p.29)). Under pressure this inability to pay attention worsens - as we can see in the numerous figures in Green's fiction gripped by monomaniacal obsessions. His praise for the 'unheard of clarity' of his fellow-workers is, ironically, achieved by a form of wilful deafness: 'they agree but they never listen' (*PMB*, p.241). Under such conditions communication often comes close to collapse: Green would indeed state that 'I have as I think short-circuited communication' ('GWE', p.24). It is an accurate assessment of the presentation of speech acts in the fiction - which, at times, seems to interpret quite literally Green's statement that in 'the novel you can't see or hear' ('NTH', p.65). His fiction frequently suggests a friction between writing and meaning - texts which, as he puts

¹ 'The Vision of Henry Green', *Hudson Review* 5 (1953), pp.614-20 (616).

it, strain against their medium, seeking to 'draw tears out of the stone' (*PMB*, p.88). From the 'harsh and unnecessary speech' of 1924's 'Adventure in a Room', to his later definition of the writer's paradoxical task, to 'excite this imagination anew in his readers without the crippling aid of speech' ('*ANR*', p.136), we can observe Green's mixed fascination and anxiety about the processes of language and meaning. Speech can be 'crippling' - Green told Nigel Dennis that in *Caught and Back* he tried to show 'human conversation at yet another social level as a means of expressing despair and defeat' ('*DL*', p.87).

When asked about the strangely disconnected dialogues in his novels Green always referred to his own poor hearing, and he gleefully told Terry Southern that

the very deaf, as I am, hear the most astounding things all round them, which have not, in fact, been said. This enlivens my replies until, through mishearing, a new level of communication is reached. My characters misunderstand each other more than people do in real life, yet they do so less than I ('*AF*', p.239).

Loving's Nanny is 'shuteyed and deaf', and she blots out threatening information behind a 'wall of deafness', her 'eyes closed or rather screwed shut in a wild look of alarm' (pp.55, 54, 125). Green's work is full of characters who suffer from impaired hearing, frequently exacerbating their usual inability to concentrate upon what has been said. It provides yet another means of displacing meaning, by disconnecting sound and sense, thereby placing one more obstacle in the way of successful communication. Richard Roe's slowness is partly ascribed to faulty hearing and he lags, a 'dopey bastard', perpetually 'behindhand' (so much so that when Hilly admits she finds him attractive, several sentences later we find him 'still wondering if she meant what, deaf as he was, he thought he had heard her say about himself' (p.110)). Rock, the main protagonist of *Concluding*, similarly combines obtuseness with a deafness aptly described as "disfiguring", since it comically distorts fragments of dialogue beyond all recognition ('peace and quiet', filtered through Rock's obsessions, becomes 'pooled the diet' (p.23)). He talks to Sebastian 'at a tangent' (p.232), twice declaring to Edge that "'We are at cross-purposes, ma'am'" (pp.194, 238). Like Nanny Swift's "wall", mishearing further complicates communication: Rock is tangibly barred from conversations, 'alone with blank thoughts, in his deafness' (p.178).

Internal narratives in the fiction are performances fraught with disaster, narrative failures which represent 'internal figures for the narratorial function' (Mengham, p.154), reflecting, in miniature, the difficulties faced by Green's narrating agencies. In *Loving* the children pay no attention to Nanny Swift's story, her fairy-tale about love a careful *mise en abîme* framed within a novel called *Loving* (it even begins with much the same formula, "'Once upon a time'", as the main narrative's 'Once upon a day...' (pp.54, 5)). Her deafness and inattention doom this secondary narrative to failure, and her threat to abandon her tale ("'"Quiet children, or I shan't finish the story you asked after'" (p.55)) is, given that her story is both bland and unsolicited, somewhat impotent. Indeed, the success of the monologic act in Green's novels is usually sabotaged by the disinterest of any given audience. Dick Dupret's story of his day at work in *Living* is blanked out by his mother's wandering thoughts; *Back*'s Mrs Frazier begins 'a long tale' which Charley 'hardly listen[s]' to, lost amidst seeing things 'round and round' in his head (pp.33-34).

Incomprehension vies with poor hearing as a way of demonstrating how language can turn into a prison for its users. This is very true of *Back*, where Charley's paranoid misreadings further complicate the already baffling world of wartime industry (see section 3.2.4), just as his incapacity to express himself, to speak of things which, he finds, cannot be named (repeatedly something stands 'between him and free speech' (p.24)), reduces him to speechless misery (a not uncommon condition in Green's fiction, where speechlessness is always equated with helplessness, as apparent in the comatose figures of Old Dupret or Mr Grant, 'lying shuteyed [...] motionless, speechless, hopeless as he must have been' (p.164)).

The problematic nature of communication between characters mirrors the relationship between text and reader. This is particularly marked in the war novels, where experience is often found incommunicable. In *Caught* Piper tells lengthy anecdotes which trail off as he forgets 'the end of his own stories' (p.75); Richard can only manage an 'inadequate description' of the Blitz (a narrative disrupted by Dy's inability to understand, Richard's inability to describe, and the text's awkward parentheses which sabotage his attempts to relate his experiences). The firemen in 'The Lull' fare no better with their 'consciously dramatic' Blitz anecdotes worn out from over use ('Lull', p.106). *Back*'s Charley similarly worries about topics which one "'can't talk about"'.

3.2.2 Problematics of the printed word

In the 1923 short story 'Adventure in a Room' Green shows how blindness can effectively sever the link between words and the represented world. Green uses sightlessness to explore the nature of perception and how it might affect the way we use language. Its protagonist instead inhabits 'a world of suggestiveness, of delicate, fragile hints of things' in which speech is tellingly said to be 'harsh and unnecessary. You could say all you wanted by creating atmosphere' ('Adventure', p.8). Non-verbal modes of discourse are a curiously recurrent theme in Green's early sketches: the parson in 'Bees' becomes preoccupied with the harmonies of his bees who 'always appeared to have something to do and were always doing it efficiently' ('Bees', p.3); his blind adolescent resolves to 'teach himself to whistle, whistle that he might talk with his birds, and that he might express all that was in him unexpressed, all the longings, the doubts, the fears' ('Adventure', p.12). John's blindness provokes acute semiotic disconnection: he can no longer mentally connect words and what they describe, and as a result comes to realise the extent to which language, hitherto unquestioningly used, shapes his comprehension of the world. Blindness creates a gap between objects and their perception:

He said "tree" out loud and it was a word. He saw branches with vague substance blocked round them, he saw lawn, all green, and he built up a picture of lawn and tree, but there were gaps, and his brain reeled from the effort of filling them (*Bl*, p.82).

As he tells Joan, blindness has created a curiously disconnected world: now he "can only see bits of it, the spaces are so hard to fill up" (p.179). The protagonist of 'Adventure in a Room' similarly imagines himself 'engulfed in a world peopled with sounds and solids' ('Adventure', p.8). Words lose their solidity and certainty, can no longer be taken for granted, just as objects take on a new and puzzling nature, recovering a strangeness lost to them in the seeing world. John Haye feels 'the grass, but it was not the same as the grass he had seen [...] He was shut out, into himself, in the cold' (*Bl*, p.82). In a universe purely constituted by words and voices language assumes an exaggerated importance, and the bond between object and word is

discovered to be merely an assumption. He has to extrapolate meaning from the 'broken ends of conversation' which he feels are 'jumbled up and thrown' at him (p.243). Unable to see or read, the spoken word becomes 'his great interest' (p.80); everything is reduced to 'words only' (p.86).

Meaning, these early examples of Green's fiction suggest, is not implicitly in language. Examples of language which has in some way become unfamiliar or strange recur throughout his fiction, which regards language as a source not only of endless fascination, but also of creative doubt. Such issues, as Randall Stevenson suggests, are characteristic of modernist writing, which typically conveys

an epistemological doubt, an uncertainty about how completely or truthfully the world can be known or communicated through any individual's idiosyncratic version of it².

Green expresses the same doubts as de Saussure in his pioneering studies in linguistics around the turn of the century. Central to *Blindness* and 'Adventure in a Room' is the idea that language links sound and idea; while Green's later theoretical articles pointedly stress his awareness that the written text is always a 'series of sound symbols', intelligible from their context alone. Green's work is fascinated by problems of communication and processes of meaning and signification. To struggle with language, to experience the frustration of communication, are the problems explored within Green's novels, where characters are at once terrorized by language and the helpless articulators of it; just as his narrating agencies encounter, as we shall see, significant problems with the narrative act.

His lectures and interviews from the early 1950s are as preoccupied with the conditions of discourse - grammar, lexical items, semantics, or symbols ('the mechanics of written communication', Green suggested ('AF', p.157)) of the written text - as the novels are obsessed with representational questions³. Indeed, this fascination with the codes of discourse pervades his work, particularly prominent in his theoretical articles. In 'A Novelist to His Readers' Green defines the relationship

² *Modernist Fiction: An Introduction* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1992), pp.26-27.

³ Green, except in tribute or as a personal favour, always refused to review other writers' work: two notable exceptions are his critical reviews of the *Oxford Book of English Talk* (a compendium of spoken dialogues in print) and *The Complete Plain Words* (a Government publication addressing the question of language use in business contexts): both examples show a keen interest in technical issues of prose representation and linguistics.

between writer and reader as 'a kind of unspoken communication in print, a silent communion with the symbols which are printed to make up the words' (p.140), the novelist's words transformed into the unalterable typographic symbols of the printed text. This 'second hand' communication 'through the black and white of print' ('UN', p.254), can be logically reduced, as his essay on the future novel suggests, to the sum of its narrative codes, 'a series of sound symbols which create words of no precise meaning outside their context'. Green continues, explaining that the alphabet

consists of a series of symbols designed to suggest sounds which the child is hearing all around it. These symbols, the letters, fix in its mind the many different words it hears in conversation, until eventually it grasps the meaning of those words. As the child grows older it learns that there is an infinite variety of meanings to each word, and as the language continues to be employed, more and more meanings to each word crop up. Therefore in narrative it is the piling up of words which alone has meaning, as tones are in the context of a painting ('ENF', p.22).

In this sensitivity to language as a series of symbols which contain an 'infinite variety' of meaning Green adopts a position entirely consistent with structuralist thought, recognising that the linguistic sign is arbitrary, and meaning tends to be assigned by social convention⁴.

Semiological enquiries run throughout the fiction, stretching from the cinematically-affected idioms of *Living* and *Caught*, to the sociological observations and mimetic experiments of the early prose stories. Typographically *Living* is highly interesting, using a variety of symbols which emphasize the *writtenness* of the text and its status as an assembly of words. Most numbers in the text are written as such, so that we have references to '5/8 spanners', '30/- short', '¼ to 4', '15%', '£60', and so on. Green also uses unconventional capitalization to great effect, particularly in the cinema scenes ('eeee Lily Gates screamed. OOEEE the audience' (p.28)). Capitals are also used to record public utilities or legends. Trams go by in *Living* 'with FOOTBALL SPECIAL showing' (p.265); while the 1930 sketch 'Excursion' starts to record advertising hoardings ('THE GAY GIRLS DANCE NIGHTLY, LAST WEEK' ('Excursion', p.64)). Lily, on the train to Liverpool, is not so frightened that she does not notice as they travel along advertisements for Pears Soap, or 'Liverpool Paper' (p.225). In *Blindness* John Haye daydreams of the lurid

⁴ A convergence all the more noteworthy, considering the unavailability of Saussure's theories in an English translation until the late 1950s.

newspaper headlines were he to revenge himself on the child who blinded him ('THE AUDACIOUS SLAUGHTERER' (p.60)). Green was to retain 'Excursion''s railway station setting and some of its ideas, and expanded it into 1939's *Party Going*. Both make much of the proliferation of signs in modern life. Their stations are a wealth of capitalized legends, quite ordinary signs described as if seen for the first time by the narration:

Stairs in corner went down from it and over those was painted: BOOKING HALL- PLATFORM 1 ('Excursion', pp.64-65); Station Master in black frock coat and top hat had come out through door with STATION MASTER painted on it (p.68; varied again, p.74);

a tunnel [with] DEPARTURES lit up over it (*PG*, p.7); stairs had LADIES lit up over them (p.8); a vast board with DEPARTURES OF TRAINS lit up over it (p.26); a larger tunnel that had HOTEL ENTRANCE lit up over it (p.36); that broad open window which had RECEPTION lit up over it (p.56).

Like newspaper headlines or silent-movie inter-titles, these cultural signposts are given undue typographical prominence, so that they stand out on the page. This turns them into phenomena: Green's railway stations are mythological places of ENTRANCES and DEPARTURES, symbolic places in which his party-goers, appropriately enough, obsessively worry about their own private symbols. Julia shapes her life about her private 'charms', while Amabel and Angela consciously see their own mirror images as symbols of their desirability.

3.2.3 Reading the 'web of insinuations'

Barthes writes that to read 'is a labor of language', and to 'read is to find meanings'⁵. This is a crucial activity in Green's fiction, which repeatedly satirizes the desire for order. Systems of meaning in his texts are rarely trustworthy, however apparently desirable they may seem. To write is to produce a 'web of insinuations', and Green's texts offer the reader a strange parallel world of coincidences, connections and welcoming creative patterns which beguile the reader into making interpretative errors. We can clearly observe this in the mistakes his characters commit trying to

⁵ *S/Z*, trans. by Richard Miller (London: Macmillan, 1975), p.11.

interpret the printed word, particularly in *Loving* and *Back*. In the former anything in print is liable to be misread. The Tennants send their servants telegrams, which Albert is forced to laboriously transcribe 'in block letters' (p.157), but these cryptically lack punctuation, and are much argued over. Green is fond of telegrams for, like his texts, they offer ways of compressing and deleting language (a model terseness echoed in his truncated idioms, eccentric punctuation, and typically ambiguous one-word novel titles). "Don't you read that the way I do", Charley Raunce asks when he examines Mike's business card: "Irish Regina Assurance. I. R. A. boy. So 'e was one of their scouts, must a' been" (p.156). Charley's inept misreading of these completely coincidental initials anticipates, as we shall see, *Back*'s acronymic world. He also gets into a hopeless muddle trying to decipher Eldon's lucrative blackmailing technique, encoded in his predecessor's notebook: without the *correct* reading code, these cryptic phrases are meaningless, and Charley accordingly makes a fool of himself with the Captain simply by trying out Eldon's reminders out of context. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that when he writes to his mother he takes elaborate precautions, painstakingly tracing his text out in pencil before inking it in.

In *Back* another Charley continues where he leaves off. For Charley Summers helplessly misreads language and disrupts the process of signification. His invented filing system also tells a cautionary tale about the dangers of trying to impose one's own patterns and assert a desire for order. This 'visible' filing system, Rose's dismembered love-letters, the 'try-on' business letter and inserted memoir all offer, thanks to Charley's misreadings, profoundly neurotic symmetries. Charley's quest for meaning propels him, in a direct imitation of Green's own cinematically-trained narrating agencies, familiar with the filmic syntax of montage, dissolves, abrupt cuts and juxtapositions as well as painterly collages, to cut up language. Having convinced himself that Rose has somehow become Nancy, he decides that the only way to prove this hypothesis would be to compare their handwriting. But he finds her letters 'too outspoken' to show to anyone else, which prompts him to dismember them, phrase by phrase, removing everything except 'those sentences [...] which he thought would not give him away' (p.121). This results in a new text, 'scissored, almost at random, out of their love letters' - an exercise in dismantling and reassembling later echoed by *Nothing*'s Mary, cutting and pasting newspaper

clippings onto blank sheets of paper; or *Doting's* Campbell Anthony, trying to edit a poetry anthology.

3.2.4 *Back*: the text as a science of signs

Back depicts a world of profound analogic disorder, in which the interpretative process spirals out of control. The novel is a particularly sustained semiological investigation, inspired by the world of wartime industry. This is a maze of misleading signs, regulated by government agencies masked by cryptic acronyms. Social life and the business world speak conflicting languages. Like a latter-day Everyman, Green's neurotic protagonist wanders adrift in an acronymic wartime landscape. "Everything's initials these days", both Mr Grant and James announce (pp.11, 19): the problem is that there is no logical connection between the initials and the agencies they represent: to an outsider like Charley, these signs are completely arbitrary⁶. For 'Britain in 1944 is literally *unreadable*' (Mengham, p.158), and all the more so for the bewildered Charley, unable to decipher them ('More letters standing he did not know what for' (p.8)). Charley's world requires translation before it can be comprehended: most aspects of life - buying clothes, travelling, or running a business - are regulated by insidious acronymic agencies (even eating out has apparently become next to impossible "what with the B. R. N. Q., the V. B. S. and the P. M. V. O." (pp.10-11)). In this world of paranoid signification both reader and cast are left wondering just who, to borrow a sentence from Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, 'can find his way about this lush maze of initials, arrows solid and dotted, boxes big and small, names printed and memorized?'⁷. *Back's* ambiguous codes are increasingly pervasive: even Charley's camp turns out to have 'flowered with initials, each inmate decorated his bunk with them out there, to let it be known what he taught' (p.8). The other characters accept the triumph of the sign with resignation:

⁶ Acronyms proliferate, and the text refers to the A.B.P., A.R.B.S., A.T.S., B.D.S., B.R.N.Q., C.A.B., C.E.C., C.E.G.S., E.N.Y.S., E.P.T., G.P.O., H.R.O.N., I.T., M.A.P., M.O.L., O.C.A., P.B.H.R., P.M.V.O., R.A.F., S.E.C.O., S.E.P.Q., S.E.V.B., S.E.V.E., S.O.M.F., and V.B.S. In addition, Dot asks Charley if he has an 'M.C.', and O.K. is a universal abbreviation.

⁷ Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow* (London: Cape, 1973), p.76.

"After five years of war, and all the S. E. this and thats which the Ministry have created to their own ends, everyone in this game is case hardened, punch drunk if you prefer it",

Corker tells Charley. Indeed, Charley must learn to negotiate a strange new world in which acronyms are talismans to be brandished at suppliers in order to "'threaten 'em'" into compliance (p.107).

Like the transformation of spoken words into written symbols, this process of initialization, the replacement of things by arbitrary signs, seems potentially limitless. After much paperwork Charley's new secretary arrives, 'the product of a prolonged correspondence'. Several weeks pass before 'these letters, these forms and the reference numbers bloomed into flesh and blood, a young woman, with shorthand, who could type' (p.37). This secretary is the word made flesh, conjured out of printed words, and Charley, unable to quite believe in the connection between letters, numbers, and this real-life woman, carefully hangs onto this documentation 'as a sort of talisman' (p.38), lest this mysterious process reverse. Her name is Dorothy, but she abbreviates this, appropriately enough, to "Dot" ("Dot and no comma", as she jokes to Charley). This symbolic transformation of the proper name into a punctuation mark is significant: Dot is 'an absolute null and void' (p.37), defined by language - which Charley unconsciously recognizes when he starts to confuse technical terms with suggestive physical observations, turning her into an object of specifically linguistic desire (p.44). This recalls those other objects of linguistic desire, *Party Going's* Embassy Richard, famous only for his vicarious existence in society gossip columns, and Amabel, 'sanctified' by 'constant printed references' in the illustrated weeklies (p.145).

Back is preoccupied with language. Charley, who focalizes the text, is, like Foucault's madman, '*alienated in analogy*'. He 'sees nothing but signs and resemblances everywhere'⁸, both misreading the signs of the world around and inventing his own paranoid connections. The choice of a psychotic protagonist was a master-stroke. Not only do Charley's misreadings ideally complement a text in which signs and initials seem to have run rampant, but the reader is forced to participate in these interpretative delusions as well. As Lacan suggests,

⁸ *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1970), p.49.

the psychotic has this disadvantage, but also this privilege, of finding himself a little bit at odds with, askew in relation to, the signifier. Once he is summoned to harmonize with these signifiers, he has to make a considerable effort of retrospection, which culminates in these extraordinarily bizarre things that constitute what is called the development of a psychosis⁹.

The appeal to Green is obvious: Charley's misinterpretations are indeed his great 'privilege': like Green's ideal reader, sensitive to the slightest nuance, nothing he comes across can be taken for granted. Charley's psychosis directly challenges the idea of meaning or signification, and the novel depicts his struggle to make sense of his linguistic environment. All literary practice, Green suggests, involves the production of meaning; and, as Corker Mead warns Charley, it is absolutely necessary not to "be in too much of a hurry to take things at face value" (p.108). Charley, of course, takes nothing at face value, and his paranoia generates hopelessly complicated coincidences which disrupt the process of signification. The more he concentrates upon what things mean the less tangible they seem to become. Existing at such a tangent from the normal is quite common in Green's fictional world: mentally-impaired characters people his novels, and through their illnesses they demonstrate the precariousness of interpretation and communication. We see this again in the figure of Liz in *Concluding*, recovering from a mental breakdown. Green, intertwining psychological impairment with linguistic disorder again, has her rarely complete sentences. She speaks instead in disconnected phrases - so much so that only with special concentration can she actually manage 'a connected sentence' (p.36). In similar fashion *Back*'s Mrs Grant misapplies proper names to people she meets; while Pye's sister Amy, abducting Christopher in silence (for words 'are no means of communication now') ends up in an asylum (*Ca*, p.14).

Back is a profoundly paranoid text which depicts, through Charley's eyes, a world of boundless coincidence and obsessive repetition, particularly of the word 'rose'. Charley owes his disability and subsequent imprisonment to a moment of inattention, 'not noticing the gun beneath a rose' which ends his war (p.5). Newly repatriated, he

⁹ *The Psychoses: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. with notes by Russell Grigg (London: Routledge, 1993), p.322.

wanders about a graveyard covered in 'rose after rose after rose', looking for his former girlfriend's grave. Her name, of course, is, 'of all names', Rose (pp. 5, 6). Charley is obsessed by his memories of Rose, and finds that 'every place he went she rose up before him' (p.56) - the very language of the text itself reproducing the paranoiac's fear of coincidence. Charley sees echoes of Rose everywhere, and Green's prose effortlessly matches his obsession. Roses stray disorientatingly into sentences, mimicking his plight: Rose is a proper name (shared by Charley's former lover, waitresses in various restaurants, someone apparently called 'Charley Rose'), a flower, a verb, and the subject of various puns¹⁰. Truly there are no limits to coincidence ("no end to such things", Mrs Frazier reckons), and no limits to the text's signifying powers. Charley, suffering from his associative disorder, alternately dreads and desires these mad textual repetitions: in his state of linguistic confusion even paranoid connections seem better than no connections at all, are familiar things which are 'something to hang on to' (p.51). As Mrs Frazier rambles on, Charley 'waited, waited for another sign' (p.36), secretly on the look out for the word 'rose' no matter what the context. Such arbitrary coincidences of completely different referents covered by this one word indeed demonstrate, through Charley's free association, that things 'have no precise meaning outside their context' ('ENF', p.22).

As his delusion worsens Charley's ability to interpret his environment collapses. He begins to weave together unrelated cultural phenomena, finding hidden, hierophantic messages behind commonplace words or phrases, and he systematically misapplies these erroneous readings out of context. Green again returns to his earlier fascination with advertising slogans, noting a series of posters or printed texts which are filtered and distorted through Charley's disordered mind. Taking the day off work he is plagued by misidentifications, seeing nothing but strange resemblances in everything he passes. And so he begins to inhabit a world of pure sign, under barrage by the bewilderingly multiple phenomena he automatically assumes contain hidden messages. Mistaking objects for her name, he finds echoes of Rose 'in florists' windows'; 'in a second-hand bookseller's with a set of Miss Rhoda Broughton'; in

¹⁰ Middlewitch begins to see things 'in a rosier light' (p.117); Charley, with Nance, 'half rose' up (p.49); and 'His day to day sense of being injured by everyone, by life itself, rose up and gagged him' (p.131).

an advert for a watering can labelled 'Carter's patent Rose'; or on a record playing the song 'Honeysuckle Rose' (pp.56-57). What is the relationship between signifier and signified? Problems of interpretation make an already confusing post-Blitz world increasingly incomprehensible. Obsessed by what he feels is Mr Grant's shabby treatment, Charley starts freely misassociating words he reads in the streets, reading personal messages into signs where none exist. When he passes a church poster beginning with the words 'Grant O Lord', he reacts swiftly: 'The first word shook him. He cried again, "the bastard," right out loud' (p.58).

Even the simplest sentence, the most innocuous phrase, or apparently everyday sign pose a serious interpretative threat. All the text's numerous letters, notes, adverts, signs and literary works are themselves texts to be interpreted, and these appear to Charley as a series of tests. Rob Jordan's letter of complaint is treated by Charley and his work-mates as an exercise in textual criticism, aiming to ascertain whether it is genuine or a 'try-on'. Charley's first reaction is to misread it 'as if it had been a note from Mr Grant' (p.108). To his highly symbolic way of thinking, everything has meaning. The presence of the 'Souvenir' exemplifies this. It is a concrete sign, sent by James to Charley as a warning, a cautionary tale (marked 'Read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest' (p.91)) reminding him of the dangers in coincidences. It declares that

"Literature has a double meaning, or it is not literature". Thus this embedded text also implies a poetics, a declaration of principle with regard to the ideas about literature that have been embodied in the events in this text [...] As is so often the case, the title of the text, through its use of puns, has already given an indication of these meanings. But, at the same time, this title seems deceptively simple. It needs the whole story to disclose the doubleness of its meaning (Bal, *Narratology*, pp.147-48).

The 'Souvenir' is an excellent example of a mirror text, what Lucien Dällenbach calls a *mise-en-abîme* (a topic which we shall return to in section 5.3.4). It effectively provides 'a platform on which the reading of the text can pivot'¹¹. The inserted text offers another example of doubling just as, structurally, it mirrors the text's main themes, while simultaneously suggesting their resolution. James' fortuitous discovery of this mirror text occurs within a text obsessed with coincidences both real and

¹¹ *The Mirror in the Text*, trans. by Jeremy Whiteley and Emma Hughes (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), p.70.

imaginary, in which meaning cannot be controlled (a conclusion exacerbated by intriguingly improbable real-life coincidences - Green's decision to translate an obscure volume from his family library and publish it in a wartime literary journal, let alone reuse it, several years later, in this novel). The reader is left wondering whether the novel prompted the reuse of the translation, or the translation anticipated the writing of the novel, so well does the mirror-text duplicate the themes of the novel which contains it.

All narrative consists of double meanings, the 'Souvenir' suggests, in this text dominated by strange coincidences, parallels, resemblances, and misreadings. Printed names particularly worry Charley. In the opening scene, looking for Rose's grave, he passes her son Ridley without recognizing him: 'he forgot the boy who was gone, who spelled nothing to him' (p.6). Meaning and spelling, Green suggests, cannot easily be separated¹². Coming upon Rose's grave Charley reacts oddly. He sees the 'sharp letters, cut in marble beyond a bunch of live roses tied in string', and is momentarily confused. Connecting the letters of her name with the real person he once knew is not immediate, and Charley processes the link slowly: 'it became plain that this was where they had laid her, for the letters spelled Rose' (pp.12-13). Only after he has spelled out the 'sharp letters' does he allow himself to believe that they indeed signify Rose's resting place. As soon as he sees Nancy, Charley once more automatically disbelieves the printed word. Nancy's nameplate, in 'Gothic lettering as cut on tombstones' (p.46), does not help. Charley naturally cross-connects the two styles rather than their printed messages: to his mind the printed word is endlessly untrustworthy. And so he decides that Rose must have, in some mysterious way, become Nancy. Changing one's name, of course, is a central obsession of the fiction. Charley tells himself that maybe Rose has become a prostitute, and is naturally concealing her real name. 'Once he realized' this, Green ironically points out, 'everything seemed to fit' and 'he again saw this whole thing as a whole' (p.67).

The climax of Charley's neurotic urge for symmetry and explanation comes when, mistrusting a wartime world which has independently developed its own structures

¹² Green reuses this motif: in *Loving* the scarf used in the children's game of Blind-Man's-Buff is marked with the words "I LOVE YOU" on it, and this message, in a typical conceit, is wrapped round Albert's head and obstructs him ('blinded as he was by these words' (p.114)). John is blind *to* words; Albert blinded *by* them, typical of the way in which Green uses sensory confusion in his novels.

and networks, he invents his own communicational network. He introduces an alternative filing system into his office. This act, we are told, keeps 'him sane throughout the first re-flowering of Rose' (p.38). It represents a typical example of paranoid signification. As he explains to Dot:

"And there's the index. And here's the cross index. The whole thing's visible. Tell at a glance, I don't think. It may seem loopy to you but this is the one way our particular job can be done" (p.39).

That it should be "visible" is of course typically tautological: Charley's system, mirroring his own disorder, is of course extraordinarily intangible, and it threatens to exacerbate even further existing confusions. Through an undeniably 'loopy' system, Charley reimposes "order" on a world which he finds incomprehensible. But all systems ensnare. Charley's secretary finds to her surprise that his bizarre filing methods are 'dead accurate', and she slowly becomes, 'without knowing', 'enslaved by the system' (p.45). She is, in a very Lacanian sense, a slave to discourse. Language structures meaning; and Charley, establishing a connection between print and fact, makes it 'visible' - and so, as Kingsley Weatherhead states, Charley succeeds in 'substituting the abstract sign for the concrete thing' (p.100). For a while the two filing systems coexist, until a serious confusion over deliveries inevitably forces Corker to reprimand Charley: "'You've fallen down. You're squint-eyed with your own system'". For, as Corker explains, you simply "'can't put one system over another'" (p.147); the structures of meaning will inevitably clash.

3.2.5 Stylistic deviations

Green's sensitivity to signs, symbols, and the difficulty of determining meaning is indisputable. An equally fascinating area of the unstable vision is his attitude to, and deployment of, language. In looking at this we are again indebted to *Surviving*, with its wealth of previously unpublished early prose experiments. The collection charts, in a remarkable collection of prose fragments, Green's early literary efforts, from school in the early 1920s to just beyond *Living* in the early 1930s. These cultivate a wide range of linguistic peculiarities, exuberantly experimenting with language, word

order, rhythm and repetition, punctuation, compression and expansion. The eccentric narrative idioms vary from piece to piece, each a virtuoso celebration of linguistic possibilities. Their mood seems often closer in spirit to poetry than prose, for Green freely uses primarily poetic devices, like compression, alliteration, and studied repetition, to dramatic effect. Immediately noticeable is Green's studied resistance to written 'literary' dialects - which is to say, the educated, colloquial ease which the majority of his contemporaries from similar backgrounds (Anthony Powell, Evelyn Waugh, Graham Greene, Christopher Isherwood, and George Orwell) would cultivate in their work - and his incorporation of a wide range of typically spoken conventions. Green later eulogized the spoken word as

that great source of our language as we know it [...] out of which as the language changes from generation to generation the written word springs ('SWW', p.173).

His fascination for the spoken word is very clear in *Pack My Bag*. He includes the text of a sermon he wrote as a child, which is notable for its nascent fondness for demotic speech, rhetorical repetition and feeling for oratorical rhythm. Green similarly admires his co-workers in the foundry, men 'literally unsurpassed in the spoken word', and who 'express themselves with an unheard of clarity' (p.241).

Living, with its arresting substitution and deletion of the definite article, is the first of Green's novels to implement any of *Surviving*'s experiments with prose idiom and spoken rhythms. Much has been made of this habit ever since Walter Allen famously defined Green's style ('Bare, repetitive, harsh, angular, sometimes deliberately clumsy') as being 'an admirable expression for the blackness and din of the foundry'¹³. And so, on one level, it is: the missing articles successfully alter the rhythm and cadence of the prose, compressing narration into angular forms by treating ordinary nouns like proper nouns. Green, explaining why he 'hit on leaving out the articles', later claimed that he wanted 'to make that book as taut and spare as possible, to fit the proletarian life I was then leading' ('AF', p.246). And there are various historical analogies - the 'widespread deicticism' of an era defined by Auden and the so-called 'telegraphic' poetic style (Cunningham, p.10: the young Evelyn

¹³ *Tradition and Dream: The English and American Novel from the Twenties to Our Time* (London: Phoenix House, 1964), p.216.

Waugh would indeed write to Green in 1929 praising the text's 'telegraphic narrative'¹⁴). *Surviving*, however, tells a different story. Its unpublished short stories show that his eccentric narrational idioms clearly predate Green's experiences of life in the foundry by many years. The opening lines of one of the earliest short stories in the collection, 'Monsta Monstrous' from 1923, state that:

Giant fell from sky into the sea and made great splash and great wave went out on all sides from where he had fallen and damaged many towns where land met the sea [...] Mountains are in Wales but he strode over these (p.21).

As John Updike comments in his introduction to *Surviving*, this story provides the first evidence of Green's readiness to countenance dramatic distortion of language, with his suppression of the article of particular interest. *Living*, after all, would be published in 1929, some six years later; *Blindness*, with its relatively orthodox linguistic strategies, comes inbetween. In a note to Neville Coghill from around 1927, accompanying another short piece, Green declared that he was

still busy experimenting with the definite article - this sort of thing "lights of town danced on water as gnats do" - and I don't know what it will come to ('Saturday', p.51).

While *Living* was what it would 'come to', it is clear that while its disconcerting mimesis indeed ably imitates a strange environment, it was certainly not developed with precisely that environment in mind. Nor is Green's use of demonstratives, however apparently ideal an expression 'for the blackness and din of the foundry', consistently applied to suggest this. As Stokes notes, while demonstratives

are normally used either to point out something obvious in the situation or to draw special attention to something previously mentioned [...] in Green's case they often do not have either of these functions [...] there seems to be no reason [...] beyond the desire to avoid using, wherever possible, the completely neutral definite article (Stokes, p.190).

He goes on, in a memorable phrase, to suggest that Green wages 'almost total warfare' on the definite article, and concludes that while Green

¹⁴ letter from June 1929, in *The Letters of Evelyn Waugh* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980), p.35.

does not completely extirpate the articles, [...] it seems to be impossible to discover any principle by which their fate is decided (p.196).

Green's deleted articles or substitutory demonstratives are indeed highly unpredictable. This is an important observation: these deletions are apparently indiscriminate, and the overall strategic purpose unclear. Articles are absconded from the foundry ('working-class') episodes and management ('upper-class') sections alike. Deviating from standard usage is clearly an aesthetic pleasure, as well as a means of forcing the reader to acknowledge these missing parts of language.

Green's novels display a healthy disregard for standard grammatical usage, taking liberties with sentence structure, word-order, and clause-subordination. All such deviations - what Patrick Swinden calls a 'deliberate mismanagement of conventional sentence formation' - signal Green's determination to subordinate accepted usage to private syntactical rules, rhythm, and conventions borrowed from spoken idiolects. Green's texts, Swinden adds, seem assembled 'as if in accordance with a manual of English grammar which is an imperfect twin of the standard text'¹⁵. Strategies which delete or substitute language are a key constituent of the unstable vision. The short stories of *Surviving* and *Living* offer ways of distorting grammar, standard word order, and adopting elliptic linguistic strategies; *Living* and *Party Going* obsessively use demonstratives in place of simple pronouns or the definite article, or delete pronouns ('There' also commonly disappears). Reporting spoken dialogue Green displays compulsive 'h'-dropping ('listen to your haitches', Mr Eames tells himself (*Li*, p.14)), making the pages of foundry dialogue look typographically unfamiliar. Green's mimesis pulls all the stops out, using those unfamiliar fractions and signs, capitals, approximated written equivalents of spoken speech ('Orstrylia', 'lardida'), and obsessive apostrophizing of "spoken" forms in print. In *Back* Green's widespread deployment of synecdoche and metonymy ensure, as we have seen, that linguistic displacement is systematic and far-reaching. Finally, there is *Loving*, which has its own particular linguistic peculiarity. Again Green employs a strategy of conversion, using adjectives in adverbial positions. The text's characters are invariably described as reacting 'sharp' rather than sharply, 'soft'

¹⁵ Patrick Swinden, *The English Novel of History and Society, 1940-80* (London: Macmillan, 1984), p.59.

rather than softly, 'violent' rather than violently, and so on. On the page these adjectives look like amputated adverbs, the conventional endings arbitrarily cut off. Green effectively manipulates standard usage to disconcert his readers with a veritable barrage of adjectival substitutions¹⁶. No explanation for the strategy, which is extremely widespread although not, as usual, entirely systematic, is offered. Like *Living's* truncations, these substitutions appear partly class-orientated, and the exceptions to the strategy are found in passages concerning the employers, rather than the servants. Mrs Tennant continues 'in a doubtful voice' (p.71), where one might have expected her to have simply gone on *doubtful*, and speaks 'vaguely' rather than just 'vague'; Violet similarly enquires 'rather sharply', not simply 'sharp'¹⁷. But, as usual, this is not a hard and fast rule, and Green once more teasingly implies a "proletarian mimesis" without providing either the necessary degree of consistency which would confirm this reading, nor indeed any explanation of the suitability of such a mimesis. Describing people, Green's narration implies, is a far from straightforward activity. Interpretative neatness is, typically, as unattainable as *Living's* inconsistent verbal oddities: Green's narrations sketch potential links between narrational register and class idiom, without, as usual in the fiction, actually specifying them. Specific oddities stray between texts - the opening sentence of *Party Going*, apparently displaced from *Living* along with excessive use of demonstratives in place of articles; *Loving's* adverbial adjectives which wander occasionally into *Back* ('she added, arch'; 'she said, pert' (pp.166, 108)).

The effect of these unexpected substitutions and strangely irrelevant additions is, as Mengham points out, a state of 'persistent metonymic disorder' (pp.50-51). North, noting the similarities between Doughty's *Arabia Deserta* and Green's use of language, notes how both

seem to present description like a pile of fragments purposely scrambled, with normal links eliminated or turned against the reader so as to emphasize that observation is not a passive partaking but a rigorous organization of disparate elements (North, p.61).

¹⁶ Green's characters are observed, for instance, behaving in any of the following manners: awkward/ breathless/ bright/ calm/ careful/ careless /casual/ cautious/ cheerful/ close/ cold/ dull/ dogged/ faint/ formal/ frank/ grim/ guarded/ inconsequent/ indifferent/ keen/ limp/ mild/ modest/ nasty/ natural/ pompous/ profound/ querulous/ rapid/ roguish/ serious/ shrewd/ slow/ sweet/ swift/ tart/ unkind/ vicious.

¹⁷ cf, 'he said friendly' (p.12); 'she spoke resigned' (p.65); 'announced agitated' (p.160); 'went on a bit wild' (p.167); 'began preremptory' (p.175).

In these texts language is, in effect, interpreted as a pile of components, to be shuffled and redeployed at will. To narrate is indeed to *assemble* (a conceit dear to Green, and one which, as we shall see, is repeatedly reiterated within his texts). The idea that language can be manipulated and fragmented is central to the unstable vision. In addition to dismembering prose Green's narratives also offer ways of reassembling it. Green on the one hand deletes linking words and phrases, yet this strategy is counterbalanced by strangely redundant coordinating and subordinating conjunctions (stray 'while's and 'and's). This defiance of prescriptive grammar is particularly common in Green's early novels. Where standard usage supplies coordinating conjunctions, Green deletes them, only to include them at points in sentences where they would usually seem redundant. Superfluous conjunctions balance apparently unconnected clauses, giving equal weight to both (a refusal to privilege either, typical of the abdication of authority, as we shall see, in Green's fiction). They also provide an anecdotal air, rather as if typically spoken conventions have been transposed onto specifically literary sentence structures. 'Test Trial at Lords' has a habit of using redundant conjunctions (*as, so*) between clauses; 'Monsta Monstrous' using redundant 'and's to yoke unrelated clauses together.

Green's use of punctuation has often been related to his fondness for the rhythms and cadence of spoken speech. It is also highly erratic throughout the fiction, ranging from the obsessive use of commas in the autobiography, wartime short stories and *Caught* (which effectively demonstrate the fragmentation of phenomena into disconnected observations¹⁸); to the unusual punctuation of *Back*, in which repeated commas, mirroring Charley's struggle to connect with his linguistic environment, refract sentences into a series of disordered sub-clauses; and finally culminating in the final novels, which go to the opposite extreme by avoiding punctuating most dialogues.

We can therefore conclude that, while Green does not follow Joyce and attempt to disintegrate language, his narratives nevertheless take startling liberties with

¹⁸ cf. the opening sentence of 'Mr Jonas': 'Above us, in the night, as we drew up, in the barrage, the sky, from street level, seemed to be one vast corridor down which, with the speed of light, blue double wooden doors as vast were being slammed in turn' (p.83). Punctuation demolishes the sentence, chopping it up into short, staccato observations.

grammar and idiom. These deviations, crucially, take place *within* language: for Green prefers to subvert existing conventions, not completely destroy them. Like a forensic pathologist, Green probes and dissects. He told Nigel Dennis that he saw his work as 'an advanced attempt to break-up the old-fashioned type of novel' ('DL', p.84), and Philip Toynbee rather aptly enrolled him in the twentieth century's 'small but formidable band of terrorists' (Stokes, p.188). Green indeed makes a very good stylistic terrorist, ever trying to eliminate something new, as he himself later confirmed: 'the more you leave out, the more you highlight what you leave in' ('AF', p.246)). The cavalier and startling liberties taken with standard grammatical usage; the sentences thrown into subtle disarray by irregular rhythms and unexpected deletions: all threaten to sabotage novels preoccupied by collapses in communication between their characters. In the novels linguistic eccentricities fragment syntax and violate established grammatical codes. Strategies which disorganise and unsettle are enthusiastically implemented: discourse in the fiction is repeatedly derailed, fractured or disrupted. In this fashion Green's texts flirt with the idea of linguistic collapse, with language on the boundaries of grammar, semantics, and idiom - strategies which, as the final mistrust of signification demonstrates, would eventually prove fatal to Green as a writer.

3.3 VOICE

3.3.1 Green's unstable narrative voices

The characteristic instability of language, and what it signifies, within Green's fiction further affects the narrative situation in his novels. Narrating, so troublesome for Green's characters, is also a significantly problematic textual function. Narration in Green's fiction is, as we shall see, highly inconsistent, alternating between positions of ostensible objectivity (i.e., narration as a textual function), and distinctly subjective narrations (narration produced by a responsible agent). Subsequent, third person past tense, narration is the norm in Green's novels (with the obvious exception of *Pack My Bag*'s somewhat ambiguous use of the first-person). Narration apparently produced by the narrating function itself, in other words not attributable to

a specific agent, is Green's standard mode of presentation - what Susan Lanser calls a 'certain degree zero of narrative identity'¹⁹ in all the novels bar *Blindness*. Green's narrations prefer to quote dialogues extensively, rather than mediating conversations by narrating them; and narrational language, with the exception of those set-piece descriptions, becomes steadily more functional from *Caught* onwards, culminating in *Nothing* and *Doting*'s unobtrusive narrations. Yet the relationship of narration to text - what Genette calls 'mood' - is far from stable in Green's fiction. As Mieke Bal notes, as 'soon as there is language there is a speaker who utters it'²⁰. Behind every third person past tense narration there is, logically, a responsible agent, however much the convention is to assume that the text, as it were, writes itself. This paradox interests Green: the technical absence of a responsible teller of the story is strikingly contradicted throughout the fiction (particularly in the earlier novels), by a variety of first person textual interventions which, in assuming narrational responsibility, reassert the principle that *someone* is logically responsible for every speech act - a manifestation of voice equally unavoidable in the obscure narrational idioms and peculiar linguistic habits which, as examined in the first part of this chapter, are also a feature of Green's novels. These take the form of self-referential semantic shifts in person, offering personalized observations or ostensibly 'narratorial' commentaries which reclassify the narrative situation. In this fashion Green's narrations typically oscillate between opposite positions: studied neutrality on the one hand (language which is functional, and lacks specific stylistic features), and sudden bursts of apparently 'personalized' observation, or intrusions of first person narrators, suggesting responsible agents (which remain unidentifiable), on the other.

Green's texts are surprisingly resistant to classification: defining narrational voice, as this section will demonstrate, poses serious problems. His novels avoid easy categorization: attributing responsibility - to narrators, narrating agencies, voices, personae and so on - can never consistently be made. The same scepticism extended to language and syntax is also applied to the narrative function (all, perhaps, *altering to be oneself*). As *Pack My Bag*, discovering the multitude of different writing *Is*

¹⁹ *The Narrative Act: Point of View in Prose Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), p.166.

²⁰ *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, trans. by Christine van Boheemen (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1985), p.121.

contained within each autobiographical utterance, implies, the question 'who narrates' is never easily resolvable.

3.3.2 Semantic shifts in person

Signs of narrativity in Green's work take a variety of formats. The most blatant example is the use of question-begging pronouns that shift the reporting position of the novels, assigning responsibility for narration to a succession of unexpected 'I's, 'we's and 'you's. *Party Going* refers to 'the beginning of a time for our party' (p.39); *Living* calls Dick Dupret 'our Richard' (p.136); while *Nothing* discusses 'our' Jane Weatherby. How these are to be read; to what voice, if any, they should be attributed to, remains unclear: who or what constitutes this inclusive 'we'? Green, who elsewhere stridently denounced the authorial 'I' as an interruption of 'the communication between author and audience', producing 'an inhibiting effect on the magic which has to be created between writer and reader' ('ENF', pp.22, 23)), certainly does not intend his audience to be unsophisticated enough to read him into his own narratives; indeed, his unease over the autobiographical first person - as we have seen both in *Pack My Bag* and its putative sequel, the autobiography 'with the least possible use of the first person singular' (synopsis to 'BGF', p.260) - is unusual to the point of seeming pathological.

The autobiographical 'I', as Chapter one has indicated, is always multiple, and its frame of reference shifts. The 'I which writes the text' is 'always new', Barthes suggests²¹. Whenever first person signs appear in these predominantly third person narratives they are fleeting, mischievous, and inconsistent. Personalized narrating voices in the texts deliberately play games with the reader. *Party Going* declares that 'it is only the rich who rule worlds such as *we* describe' (p.89, my emphasis) - an interesting hypothesis indeed. Such semantic emphases recur throughout Green's texts:

Miss Glossop was downcast. *We have seen* her feeling [...] Then, *as we know* [...] Then, *as we have*

²¹ Roland Barthes, *Image-Music-Text: Essays*, selected and trans. by Stephen Heath (London: Macmillan, 1977), p.161.

seen (Li, pp.167-68);
[Lily] went on with arguments for their going *which we have heard* and he (Li, p.206);
between Amabel and Max [...] there was her power over him *as we shall see* (PG, p.134);
Pye *we have seen* preoccupied with his past (Ca, p.63, my emphases).

Certainly *Party Going*'s superior, ironic (a world that *we* describe indeed), cultured and 'literary' first person plural teasingly invites the reader to share this comfortably upper-class world, although such an ideological fusion is absurd (and a far remove from *Living's*, or Green's own, oft-stated demotic sympathies). The first person plural also suggests a form of complicity between narration and the characters it describes. As a form of editorial self-designation, this leads the text into uncertain regions of voice and attribution. The text records various snobbish assertions about the text's idle rich protagonists:

[Max's flat] was expensive in proportion. That is to say that if these things had been authentic he would not have had to pay more, anyone less well-off could have bought museum pieces cheaper (p.32);
They avoided all discussions on taste [...] Rich people cling together because the less well off embarrass them (p.134).

Disdainful references to 'these people', or to 'that class of person who will only judge people by what they read' (p.133) establish this narrational voice's credentials. Throughout the text the narrating function creates chances for intervention, allowing specific voices or 'narrators' to address implied 'readers'. Whenever these first and second person pronouns appear they create their own dramatic hypothetical situations, imagining an interaction between "narratees" and "narrators". The narration in *Party Going* constantly addresses *someone else*, rhetorically hinting how things might have looked to *another*. If 'you were to make yourself heard, it was necessary to speak up, you found so many people were talking', one sentence tortuously observes (p.28). In the station both party-goers and stranded workers alike 'would have looked to you' slightly ridiculous. 'You would have been amused', this voice states, if 'you had been ensconced in that fog', or 'if you had been seven thousand feet up' (pp.14-15).

We can trace some of *Party Going*'s eccentricities back to Green's eventually abandoned novel 'Mood', started around 1926, although still apparently being worked on in the early 1930s, according to *Surviving* (p.28). 'This book is about

Constance', it declares, 'When you have read it you too will say how charming Constance is'. Portions of the surviving text are transposed into the second person:

When you came in by the front door [...] when you came into that room and looked round and cried out, as you couldn't help doing, Lord what a fine room, then, when you saw those aeroplanes you might sing those are her pets, that's what is most hers in here. When you came in and saw them it might be like you came into a King's rooms ('Mood', pp.32-34).

'Mood' manipulates discourse conventions, mimicking the characteristics of the speech act. The decentring of voice achieved in these fragments, and the liberties this takes with narrative convention, make this unsuccessful experiment curiously modern, a stratagem ironically anticipating a common feature of the *nouveau roman*. All such rhetorical invitations in the fiction display a reluctance to take responsibility for perception, thereby side-stepping the issue of authority. In *Living*, for example, as Lily walks down the street we are told that 'if you looked it was all over her face, what she was feeling' (p.189), a cautious formulation which carefully renounces the interpretative prerogative. *Party Going* invents numerous positions of supposed complicity between 'narrator' and 'reader', which pretend that perception is a mutual activity. Having likened the crowds in the station to 'swarming ponds of humanity' (p.26), the narration then refers to Angela and Robert standing in the forecourt like 'two lilies in a pond [...] floating in it *if you will*', just as Angela is 'coveted for her looks by all those water beetles *if you like*' (p.27). On the following page, picking up the simile, the text declares: '*If* that swarm of people *could be* likened to a pond...' (p.28, my emphases). Evaluation and perception are plainly tentative enterprises. Green's narrations are unreliable and typically lack authority; and the refusal to take responsibility for narrative attribution is one aspect of a wider disorder in the fiction: the fluctuating levels of textual authority wielded by Green's narratives.

The effect of these second person signs is equivocal. On the one hand, the generalizing use of the personal pronoun sends out a linguistic signal which projects the *idea* of a narrator, rather than suggesting a genuine responsible agent. The first person speakers which intermittently intervene behind "impersonal" third person narration in the novels are illusions, hollow self-designations which impersonate the authority of an identifiable first person speaker (for attribution and origins are inseparable; and *origin*, as the autobiography's ambivalent relationship with the first

person makes abundantly clear, is a perennially tricky subject).

The other striking potential implication of these second person pronouns is that they represent a potential avoidance of a narratorial first person, allowing an apparently objectified 'narrator' to shift perceptual responsibility and transpose observation onto a hypothetical second person - an unease over the use of the first person mirroring the autobiography's problems with the status of the narrating *I* and its authority. As Bal writes, the 'you' is logically an 'I' in disguise, a means of avoiding specifying the narrative situation²². 'Mood's irritating second person habit is, however, finally thrown aside when a first person voice assumes responsibility, declaring 'Also she had these dreams I have described' (p.36).

The transience of such interventions, whether intended either as the expression of an apparently upper-class narrational idiom, or some form of imitation of that idiom, emphasizes how unstable Green's 'you's are; and furthermore, in this displacement of responsibility represented by the avoidance of the first person, stresses the problems with authority his work dramatizes.

3.3.3 Intimations of "narrators"

When Green's narrating agencies are redefined as 'narrators' they go off on capricious tangents, pursuing inconsistent agendas. Given what we have seen of the behaviour of character in the fiction it is not hard to see the connections between the two - both, using language, are taken over by different voices, sociolects and idiolects. The transmission of narrative information is often curiously erratic, particularly when Green's narrating agencies take on the identifiably subjective characteristics of "narrators". This assumes a variety of forms: oddly clichéd observations which supply apparently redundant information; subjective comments which undermine the authority of narrating; opinionated statements often taking the form of axioms or proverbs; and additional evaluative judgements. These 'slips' in register break the linguistic illusion that the texts narrate themselves, voicing attitudes which are inappropriate or stereotypical, and which undermine textual

²² Mieke Bal, 'Second-Person Narrative', *Paragraph* 19:3 (1996), 197-204 (181).

authority. Like *Blindness*'s voices which 'come and go' (p.149), so too do Green's narrations shift between differing categories of voice throughout the texts, borrowing narratorial designations which intermittently surface in the texts and intimate the mannerisms of personalized narrators.

Mengham notes how 'crass intimations of an omniscient author' (p.103) are a recurrent feature in Green's work, particularly in the earlier novels. Bathetic and consciously redundant secondary clauses qualify straightforward narrative observation in *Living*:

Thousands came up the road to work [...] Sirens were sounded, very sad (p.16);
[Lily] dragged gamp behind her more and more, most mournful thing to see (p.162);
Soon passionate scene was being enacted, as they say (p.206).

Equally whimsical pedantic epithets are repeated after characters' names:

Jim Dale, who was Mr. Craigan's young mate in iron foundry (p.14); Dale that was his mate in iron foundry (p.115);
Philpots, foundry foreman [...] "...Andrew", foreman's name was Andrew Philpots (p.73); Andrew (foreman in iron foundry shop) (p.100); Andrew (that was foreman in iron foundry shop in this factory) (p.111); Andrew, foreman in iron foundry shop (p.141).

After Dick Dupret inspects the factory, he returns home to his mother, and is painstakingly identified as 'her son (who had walked round factory with Mr Bridges)' (p.30). This habit slides into simplistic parody: 'Man and woman who owned the house sat down to evening meal [...] Their name was Johns' (p.157); 'This man [Tarver] was chief designer in Birmingham factory. He was very clever man at his work' (p.7).

A similar self-consciousness is displayed by Green's intermittent use of the passive voice to invoke the narrating instance - another sign of narrativity which avoids directly making a first person identification. These typically direct the reader's attention, recalling topics already covered in the narrative, and emphasizing the novel's status as a written text:

Miss Gates. Now, *as has been said* (Li, p.144);
In night clubs, *it has been described* (Ca, p.63);
[Richard] imagined, *as has been described*, a great deal going on all round (Ca, p.99);
As has been explained most of this great house was closed (Lo, p.61);
as has already been described, there was the second lot of flying bombs (Ba, p.138, my emphases).

Green uses similar statements in his autobiography ('as you have seen'; 'as we shall see later' (pp.15, 84)) to highlight the gap between narrator and autobiographical subject. Their function is, of course, as redundant as any of the personalized comments made elsewhere: they offer playful metanarrative pointers, teasingly returning the reader back to the text itself 'as it is printed here' (*Ba*, p.92).

In describing the antics of Tom Tyler and his friends in *Living's* house party, the narration freely mixes narrational idiom with vocabulary apparently borrowed from the characters themselves. At this point the text's mimesis departs from the conventional third person and assumes the characteristics of an apparently autonomous first person narrator:

The chair was broken. That was a very good joke [...] All this was good clean fun [...] So it was all good clean fun [...] everyone *I* say tried to push the person in the middle [...] it is quite true to say that there was nothing dirty in all this [...] it was all - how shall I say - all was... (pp.133-34).

A similarly subjective narrative persona again hijacks the text to narrate the unfortunate night-time climax of Lily and Bert's adventure. The arrival of a first person 'narrator' is memorably eccentric:

Now, for first time that year, day lingered noticeably in sky as the hour grew later, clouds were blown away or melted, *I don't know* (p.190, my emphases).

The dark and hostile Liverpool described is a surreal blend of the objective and the bizarrely idiomatic:

What is a town then, how do I know? [...] Ugly clothes, people, houses [...] Thousands of lamps, hundreds of streets, each house had generally a mother and complacent father, procreating, breeding, this was only natural thing there in that miserable thing home, natural to them because it was domesticated. Procreating was like having a dog, in particular spaniels. Fido who I'm so grateful to. Miserable people (p.228).

Here was dropsical fatness of shopkeepers' paunches [...] "Well now," said fat shopkeeper they met afterwards squirming along in shadows of the street looking for a bit of fun - these courting couples in the doorways y'know, y'know you can see a bit o' fun o' nights - "well now," he said (pp.229-30).

The effect is startling, if undeniably derivative, for Green makes no attempt to conceal his indebtedness to Eliot and Joyce (the idea of borrowed, unidentified

narrative voices central to *The Waste Land*'s 'rhythmical grumbling'; while his setting recalls the 'night-town' section of *Ulysses*). The borrowings give the game away, figuratively: *Living*'s use of the first person aims, like Eliot, to 'do the police in different voices'; showing how any section of narrative can be taken over by a pastiche of unspecified voices and idioms. As in the teasing invitations to class-solidarity, the effect is tangential. Similarly misanthropic turns fleetingly reappear in the subsequent fiction, from the voice in *Party Going* which invites the reader to compare its cast to 'conduits [...] crawling worms on either side' (pp.14-15), to the passage in *Caught* which states that

Every man jack was full of his little woman and the Edies, the Joans, and the little Marys, in their pinnies, he had left behind, sleeping in their little cots (most likely watching mum in bed with a stranger), in what each man was proud to call home (p.43).

Such opinions are far from what the implied narrator of Green's texts, were such a concept applicable - humanist, socially amphibious, with strong proletarian sympathies - would logically express. The point that Green makes here, and as we have seen in his mimics and decentred characters, is that discourse can, potentially, always be borrowed *from elsewhere*.

3.3.4 Attributing voice

Green's narrations are made up of, as Gibson puts it, 'a mixture of different voices'. Voice itself interests Green: the protagonist of *Blindness* inhabits a world of pure voice, an unfamiliar aural world fabricated from 'broken ends of conversation', and these voices become John's 'great interest' (p.243). His narratives incorporate a variety of different voices which assume responsibility for narration, and his characters are frequently found helplessly articulating language. Green's fiction is particularly sensitive to the idea of the text as a collection of different voices or languages. As Beckett's Unnamable proclaims, in the novel 'all is a question of voices' (*Trilogy*, p.317)²³. Green's narratives do not employ a distinctly 'narratorial'

²³ Green's own theoretical future novel, realized in *Nothing and Doting*, itself envisages a primarily dialogic text, abstracted to a succession of endlessly talking speakers.

or literary prose style separate from the language of the characters. Furthermore, just as narration is rarely limited to one monologic voice within each novel, it also tends to alter and change from novel to novel - leading, as comparison of these pseudo-narratorial voices in *Living* and *Party Going* suggests, to quite startling differences of tone. As Gibson recognizes,

the most characteristic narrative idiom in Green's novels is itself a mixed one. It blends the tones of different social groups, the literary and the colloquial, the vernacular and good novelese. There is in fact, no single prose style that we can recognise as Green's. The idiom in most of the novels is varied and unpredictable (*RND*, p.124).

Green's narrational mimeses seem often unfathomable. They fluctuate at random, with no suggestion that any sort of sustained search for a stable narrative idiom is in progress. *Surviving's* sketches frankly resist the idea of a stable mimesis, oscillating between restless idioms which traverse, apparently at random, a variety of potential strategies. They alternate between the conventionally elegant and the deliberately ungainly, the ornate and the functional (just as later the Blitz stories flicker between prosaic and fantastic prose strategies). The waywardness of these tamperings with standard usage is undeniable, and what holds true for one story will be discarded for entirely new idiomatic or syntactic irregularities in the next. This is particularly marked in *Living* where, having created a strikingly effective textual language, a plausible new "proletarian" idiom, Green nevertheless, in his subsequent texts, just as readily relinquished it. Neither the abandoned *Mood* nor the eventually published *Party Going*, almost a decade later, show much interest in *Living's* idiomatic achievements. The latter has its own idiosyncrasies, but they are quite different from those of *Living*. And this proves to be a characteristic of Green's startlingly unpredictable body of fiction: in all the subsequent novels new idiosyncrasies appear in each text - although without completely obliterating past idiomatic advances altogether. Governing patterns of idiom abruptly alter from text to text, although in each case these do not completely obscure earlier idiomatic oddities, which intermittently recur elsewhere.

Green's narrative idioms are peculiarly flexible, resulting in 'a form of narrative in which there is always a process of ceding, yielding to what is different or opposite, blending with it' (*RND*, p.129). This flexibility particularly apparent in the often

curious similarities between narrational idiom and the language of the texts' characters, thereby eroding distinctions between them. Whatever textual positions Green's narrating agencies adopt throughout the novels, whether internal or external, personalized or impersonal, the language used to narrate the texts and the language of the characters within the texts are not emphatically different. The lack of genuine distance is all the more pronounced when Green's narrations take on the characteristics of narrators, and in doing so use identifiably similar expressions and catchphrases to members of the cast. Certainly his narrations move between fluctuating postures and idioms often scarcely different from the language of characters in the text. Free indirect discourse - narration which employs idiomatic expressions which could be attributed to characters within any given scene, but which fails to provide any direct indication that they might have said anything - does occur in Green's novels, where frequently 'the language of any given character is likely to affect the narrative context' (*RND*, p.126). Toolan talks of 'temporary alignments' of 'words, values and perspective' between narration and characters - and certainly Green's narrating agencies often seem to take on characteristics directly borrowed from linguistic material in the text: to quote Genette,

the narrator takes on the speech of the character, or, if one prefers, the character speaks through the voice of the narrator, and the two instances are then *merged*²⁴.

Green, recognising the delicate balance between the supposed autonomy of characters and their indirect function, as conveyors of authorial intent, noted that the novelist must 'clothe his purpose' in dialogue ('SWW', p.171). Fiction's necessary compromise between the requirements of narrative exposition and the independence of its characters ensures that all dialogue in the novel inevitably serves, as Bakhtin suggests, 'two speakers at the same time', in which the illusion of the character's 'direct intent' blends with the 'refracted intention' of the author²⁵. Green accentuates this fundamental truth, ensuring the steady erosion of distinctions between the idiomatic registers of his characters and the various narrative voices. His texts

²⁴ *Narrative Discourse: An Essay on Method*, trans. by Jane E. Lewin (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), p.174.

²⁵ *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. by Michael Holquist and trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p.324.

accordingly tend to adopt narrative styles and idioms suspiciously similar to the idiomatic registers of characters - perfectly illustrating what Patrick O'Donnell calls the 'ventriloquistic desire' of narrators²⁶. Green's work explores the question of attribution: his characters share out discourse between themselves, and this is then reappropriated by various narrating voices. Green's fictional worlds and his narrative strategies are similar: the texts' 'narrators' borrow the idioms of the characters, or assume personae at a tangent from predominant textual norms; his characters assimilate each other's linguistic habits, or borrow idioms from things that they have read or heard. Green's 'clothing purpose' therefore effectively covers a series of possible appropriations. As Andrew Gibson's excellent study of Green's indeterminate idioms notes, there is

a peculiar relationship between the various characters in Green's world and Green's narrative idiom. To some extent, at least, it traverses them all impartially, absorbing, mingling, and redistributing their tones. [...] in much of Green's work, the narrator's idiom is sometimes scarcely distinct from the idioms of some of the characters (*RND*, p.126).

Green's narrating agencies periodically borrow idiolects or attitudes from characters. This is a habit which takes no notice of context: as Gibson notes, Green's work is littered with stylistic examples 'singularly inappropriate to the character who is the subject of attention'. *Party Going*, for example, is 'strewn with scraps of proletarian idiom, though the novel contains no proletarian characters of any importance' (*RND*, p.126). Like free indirect discourse, Green's texts generate examples of modes of expression 'perceived as incompatible with the narrator's voice', but, unusually, without borrowing from the specific linguistic characteristics of those present in any given scene²⁷. Instead Green's narratives typically contain specific linguistic echoes out of context. His narrations 'assimilate the linguistic habits of others' (*RND*, p.126), borrowing freely and without compunction from all available sources, both textual and extra-textual. Thus making narration, as Bakhtin puts it, quite explicitly the expression of '*another's speech in another's language*', a sort of palimpsest of narrative performances in which the words of one character will be concealed in the

²⁶ *Echo Chambers: Figuring Voice in Modern Narrative* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992), p.46.

²⁷ Brian McHale, 'Free Indirect Discourse: A Survey of Recent Accounts', *PTL* 3 (1978), pp.249-87 (270). The passage quoted is based on the writing of Charles Bally.

speech of another character or narrational idiom, however seemingly-inappropriate (*Dialogic Imagination*, p.324). We can see this in the ways in which Green's characters borrow voices and idioms (as examined in section 1.5.3), impersonating each other, textually sanctioned by the presiding narratorial mimicry, in this body of fiction defined by its diversity, this 'mixture of different voices' (*RND*, p.125). The scale of work which *Living* alone poses criticism, with its bizarre mimetic incorporations, idiolects, and narrational voices, gives some indication of this peculiarly problematic area of Green's fiction, so filled with examples of 'semantic materials which evoke a "voice" or presence other than the narrators', the 'appearance of otherwise inadmissible material' (McHale, p.269). There is not so much a grey area between narrational speech and the idiom of characters in Green's fiction, as an irreducible opacity: it is ultimately impossible to assign responsibility within his novels. Green's narrative situations contain the possibility of various interpretative positions, and embrace a wide register of individual idioms or voices.

The multiplicity of all discourse is equally apparent in the activities of Green's mimics, and in the acts of ventriloquy recorded throughout his novels. Bakhtin's declaration that the writer

does not speak in a given language, but he speaks, as it were, *through* language, a language that has somehow more or less materialized, become objectivized, that he merely ventriloquates (*Dialogic Imagination*, p.299)

provides a useful way of approaching Green's narratives, where the ventriloquistic aspects of the narrative act problematize fixation and attribution of narrative voice to character, narrator, implied author, persona, or writer. 'Voice' and 'identity' are, in Green's work, not unitary but instead unusually distributed between different groupings of characters, and narrating agencies which have taken on the characteristics of narrators. Kenner, seeking to assess the nature of voice in Joyce's particularly polyglot work, formulated the theory of textual 'gravitational fields', intersecting and overlapping narrators and characters²⁸. This is a profitable insight into Green's fiction, which typically blends its ingredients, a habit well illustrated in *Party Going*'s mix of the narrational and the figural. Idiolects and opinions merge

²⁸ Hugh Kenner, *Joyce's Voices* (London: Faber and Faber, 1978), p.16.

and transfer between the novel's characters, just as their idioms further stray unexpectedly into narrational passages, blurring the distinction between narratorial and character-based perception. A section apparently focalized through the station-master describes the fog-bound station ('like November sun striking through mist off water'), then shifts perspective to straight narratorial comment, stressing that this is only how it '*might* all have looked to Mr Roberts, ensconced in his office away above' (p.28); the same comparison reappears in one of Julia's monologues later on ('it *did* seem like November sun striking through mist rising off water' (p.86, my emphases)). Since Julia is naturally unaware of the earlier (narrative) comparison, her confirmation of the earlier simile is naturally puzzling. Such moments recur. Julia wonders out loud: "'What do we know about anyone?'" (p.95); the narration somewhat later observes that 'no one can be sure they know what others are thinking' (p.144); later still a passage focalized by Alex notes 'again how impossible it is to tell what others are thinking or what, in ordinary life, brings people to do what they are doing' (p.149). Alex and the narrating agency, for example, express on various occasions curiously similar phrases. 'People one hardly knew were always putting one in false positions' Alex wonders (p.78); a statement later taken up in the declaration that 'People, in their relations with one another, are continually doing similar things but never for similar reasons' (p.114), not directly attributable to anyone save the narrating agency. Throughout the text Green plays with such questions: apparently unproblematic recorded thoughts are often qualified by a provisory 'or', thus questioning both what is being thought, and who is responsible for it.

There are other curious examples of distribution in the text. Take the puzzling references to birds, for instance. The text opens with Miss Fellowes' unexpected encounter with a pigeon, then cuts to Angela and Robin arriving. The text then states, gratuitously, that 'it was not for them simply to pick up dead birds and then wander through slowly' (p.8). And hereafter birds start to creep in everywhere: into the narration, into the characters' speech. Max tells Julia that if Embassy Richard "'was a bird, he would not last long'", a non-sequitur that even Julia finds puzzling (she asks him 'what on earth he meant'; getting, of course, 'no answer' (pp.64-65)). Max's unwitting ventriloquation of a textual obsession is later matched when Edwards advises Thomson to "'Go on if you like and pick up some bird, alive or dead'"

(p.159). Julia wonders at the rudeness of Miss Crevy ('How absurd of Angela to call him Embassy Dick like any bird' (p.164)); Alex meanderingly imagines that to be rich is merely a matter of comfort - 'if you have to die then not as any bird tumbling dead from its branch' (p.195). Another example of problematic textual attribution is provided by Robert and Julia's shared childhood memories of a bamboo patch. This is first mentioned by Robert, who likens the confusion in the station to this private place, a memory of bamboos which

grew so thick you could not see what temple might lie in ruins just beyond. It was so now, these bodies so thick they might have been a store of tailors' dummies, water heated [...] so stiff they might as well have been soft, swollen bamboos in groves only because he had once pushed through these, damp and warm (p.47).

He mentions this to Julia (p.61), and she in turn admits to herself that 'these bamboos, or probably they had been overgrown artichokes, had taken on a great importance in her mind' (p.108). When the mysterious detective struggles across the station hall a hybrid version of these two accounts appears:

To push through this crowd was like trying to get through bamboos or artichokes grown thick together or thousands of tailors' dummies stored warm on a warehouse floor (p.178).

Finally, right at the novel's end, Julia imagines sharing with Max 'a much more exciting thing of their own, artichokes, pigeons, and all' (p.255) - a sentence which ingeniously combines these two practically autonomous textual motifs. 'Imagery primed for the merest pretext', Mengham notes (p.123): there seems no way of untangling what belongs legitimately to whom. Such examples, of course, once again lead us back to the idea of language controlling characters as much as they control it. Obsessions, therefore, seem to be shared impartially between 'narrators' and cast alike, so much so that it is at times hard to tell them apart. *Back's* use of the 'rose' motif, as examined earlier in this chapter, provides another excellent instance of a theme impartially traversing a text.

3.3.5 Autonomous language

Given the quite bewildering multiplicity of levels and potential voices throughout the fiction the reader is entitled to wonder who the language does, in fact, belong to at any given point. This is clear from the curious manifestations of personae, the borrowings from other discourses (characters, author, or voices which simply cannot be tracked down) and the problematic insertions of *Caught*: to what extent, Green's work suggests, is language potentially autonomous? Certainly Green's characters are often more instruments of discourse than successful manipulators of it, just as in extreme fashion the mimics show how one can be controlled by one's linguistic environment. The emphasis upon characters in the fiction who articulate words without seeing how little command they have over them is, in effect, a dramatization of Green's own negotiations over language and idiom, authority and instability, which we can see in the ever-evolving idioms of the early sketches in *Surviving*, or the constantly-altering narrative voice within and between novels. Determining the precise origin of any given utterance is therefore characteristically difficult, reflecting the problematic status of language, self and voice within the fiction. The constant borrowing of phrases and attitudes by Green's characters reflects the importance of shared idioms in his work, which typically explores the collective aspects of linguistic usage - or, as Saussure would have it, in seeing language as a pre-existing network which is individually modified by its users.

This is particularly apparent in his use of description. Green stated that until *Nothing* and *Doting* he had 'tried to establish the mood of any scene by a few but highly pointed descriptions' ('AF', p.240). These 'highly pointed' descriptions are readily recognisable phenomena in the texts, 'carefully arranged' for maximum emblematic effect ('ANR', p.140). Discussing the nature of description, Genette notes that the rhetoricians classified it

among the ornaments of discourse: extended, detailed description appears [...] as a recreational pause in the narrative, carrying out a purely esthetic role, like that of sculpture in a classical building²⁹.

The effect of Green's descriptions is often startling. Giorgio Melchiori commends the unexpected flourishes of feeling, fanciful word-pictures departing from his more restrained style in

²⁹ *Figures of Literary Discourse*, trans. by Alan Sheridan with an intro. by Marie-Rose Logan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p.135.

the same way as a complicated stucco scroll will suddenly break out of the quiet and balanced form of an arch or balustrade in a seventeenth-century building³⁰.

As Melchiori suggests, Green's set-piece descriptions do take have a quasi-autonomous feel to them. Their highly strategic deployment makes them resemble 'fragments of narrative description' which 'seem oddly detached from their context - sometimes as self-conscious performances, arabesques or tours-de-forces' (Gibson, *RND*, p.124). They are, as Gibson suggests, further placed into relief by Green's otherwise predominantly dialogic exposition or restrained, effaced prose description: 'marked by a care, by a finesse or a quality of feeling which sets them at odds with the context in which they are located' (*RND*, p.131). Their very prominence, therefore, distinguishes them from the surrounding prose. And in these ornamental descriptions language, Green seems to suggest, writes itself, a product of the narrational function neither linked to any particular character nor especially connected to the text in which they appear.

3.4 AUTHORITY

3.4.1 Questions of access, speech-representation, and focalization

Gibson suggests that Green's willingness to surrender the conventional supremacy of the narrative voice, his reluctance 'to privilege the narrator's language over characters' language', represents a serious 'abdication of authority' (*RND*, p.126). We have seen how Green's narrating agencies periodically refuse to accept responsibility for perception or narrative transmission, and intermittently give way to unstable voices or personae, which then articulate unreliable opinions or redundant observations. To narrate is alternately to slip between idioms and attitudes, and between positions of authority, and positions of ignorance.

In general Green's texts chart a progressive diminishment of narrative authority.

³⁰ *The Tightrope Walkers: Studies of Mannerism in Modern English Literature* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1956), p.189.

The possibility of being authoritative is habitually parodied in Green's narratives, in which the capacity to describe, access characters, move or see is steadily eroded or sabotaged, culminating in the final novels' renunciation of description. Whenever authority is asserted it tends to be fleeting. Omniscient spatial poses are briefly assumed and just as briefly abandoned; intimations of superior narratorial knowledge are followed by direct admissions of ignorance. Characters are occasionally interrupted by narratorial interventions exposing their limited perspectives. Max and Amabel are halted, mid-dialogue, as the narration points out a discrepancy ('They did not either of them notice the slip she had made' (*PG*, p.223)); Charley misunderstands Nancy in *Back* when she refers Mr Grant's death ('of course he was not to know this, not at once' (p.195)). Mrs Blain believes mistakenly in the goodness of her girls ('She was in great ignorance'); Winstanley misreports Merode's words ('Most of this was false, if Miss Winstanley had only known'); Edge misconstrues the apparent enthusiasm of her pupils for the pig farm as being unanimous ('if she had only known'); Baker heads back to the school completely unaware of what is going on elsewhere ('*She did not know*, but the sergeant had not preceded her by many minutes. *Neither of them could tell* this was where Merode had been found' (*Co*, pp. 24, 97, 137, 153, my emphases)). Green's characters can also be admonished: Julia's opinion of the singing crowd, as she looks down on them ('like sheep with golden tenor voices, so she was thinking, happily singing their troubles away') is carefully deflated: since we are told that 'what they sang in Welsh was the rape of a Druid's silly daughter [...] She only thought they knew what it meant' (*PG*, p.152). Such corrections are particularly marked in *Caught*, which obsessively intermediates between the limited perspectives of its characters and things they cannot tell, from Hilly's account of events causing Richard's current unpopularity at the fire station ('She was, of course, hopelessly wrong in this' (p.103)); to Richard's confidence in the Auxiliaries ('he was wrong' (p.105)); or his failure to explain the colour of fire engines ('Who was he to know' (p.149)). These are, however, all temporary assertions of authority; and elsewhere access to characters' thoughts is usually absent. Only in *Blindness* can narration be said to be consistently omniscient, free to access all characters equally. From *Living* onwards narrational insight is a matter of chance: following *Party Going*, the power to represent the pre-verbal is increasingly questioned. *Party Going* still permits thought-transcription, but does so

stressing the mediation of all such narrational versions. The text records Max's thoughts, then admits that he has been thinking 'without putting it into words' (p.226); and focalizes the view of the station forecourt through the mystery man, similarly not 'putting this into words' (pp.175-76). Henceforth reported monologues (free direct discourse) disappear, while the verbalization of thought become increasingly rarer in the subsequent fiction. With the exception of *Back*, focalized and largely narrated by Charley (and even here the omniscient access is sabotaged by Charley's inability to explain himself), Green's texts from 1940 onwards chart a world seen increasingly from the outside, in which the internal is abandoned in favour of what can be externally recorded.

Much the same process is apparent in the way spoken speech is depicted in the novels. Again only *Blindness* and *Living*, Green's first two novels, do not almost exclusively use direct dialogue to report what characters say. The wide variety of techniques found in *Living* - a heady mixture of free indirect discourse, paraphrased dialogue, echoes of actual phrases in reported speech, unlocatable idiomatic irregularities, snatches of direct discourse identified as such - which ensure that the separation of what might have been said from the manner in which it has been narrated is almost impossible, are subsequently scaled down dramatically. Direct discourse simply transcribed by narration forms the basis of all the subsequent texts. Barring scene-conclusions, diegetic summaries or paraphrased speech acts are hardly ever recorded. This culminates in the later 'dialogic' fiction, *Nothing* and *Doting*, novels in which the primary function of narration is transcription rather than commentary, a relinquishing of the right to narrate.

Focalization is as varied and unpredictable as Green's narrative mimesis. With the exception of *Nothing* and *Doting*, whose rigorously external perspectives illustrate the newly-voiced theory, none of Green's texts are *seen* in the same way. *Blindness* is focalized through an alternating series of characters - what Genette calls a 'variable figural' style of focalization - with no external shifts of perspective, or real discrepancy between narrational perception and the observation of characters. This changes in the next three novels, *Living*, *Party Going*, and *Caught*. *Living* adopts a series of separate characters as focalizers (Genette's category of 'multiple figural'

focalization). This is also true of the focalization of *Party Going*, although this is further complicated by those positions of external omniscience (looking down on those who 'being in it' cannot 'view themselves as part of that vast assembly' (p.200)), and manifestations of a contrary internal, self-designated 'narrator', apparently inscribed within the narrow field of the text (talking of everyone 'in one place', marking 'the beginning of a time for *our* party' (p.39, my emphases)). *Caught*, on the other hand, makes the question 'who sees' as unanswerable as the question 'who narrates', intercutting external observations of Roe's leaves from work with internal focalizations at various points in time (generally with Richard as the focalizing agent, but occasionally shifting to other characters as well), and finally adding the parenthetic sections which resist attribution. *Caught*'s basic strategy is used later in *Concluding*, also mainly although not exclusively focalized by a central character (Rock). Here Green uses another excuse of debility - this time poor eyesight - as an excuse to sanction a textual focalization repeatedly sabotaged by angles of vision. *Loving* marks an abrupt change, however, adopting an external focalization (later returned to and elaborated on in *Nothing* and *Doting*). For *Loving* instead adopts a predominantly external focalization, marking a major change in Green's fiction and anticipating the theoretical extremes of the final two novels. Here access is an aspect of authority, and rationed accordingly: the narrative is focalized by a myopic narrating agent apparently no more privileged than any character; in *Nothing* and *Doting* all observations are estranged. The last of Green's wartime-based novels, *Back*, is unique in employing a fixed focalizer in Charley Summers³¹. This is again unexpected: its internal focalization confines the reader within Charley's peculiar perspectives, therefore representing a diametrically opposite approach to the external one used in *Loving*.

3.4.2 Textual heteroglossia

Every novel, Bakhtin argues, is a myriad of individual languages or 'incorporated

³¹ The unusualness of this is pronounced: as North notes, because much of the fiction 'denies the idea of psychological depth, Green infrequently offers his readers the opportunity to enter into a central character' (p.215).

genres' (*Dialogic Imagination*, p.321). This blending of different languages, or textual *heteroglossia*, as he terms it, is particularly relevant to Green's texts, which readily borrow from other artistic genres (cinema, modern art), and traverse a variety of social idioms. Insertion and incorporation of extra-textual material is, moreover, an essential activity in Green's fiction. Green is highly sensitive to the possibilities that different modes of expression offer, and fascinated by the idea of 'forging fresh fictional languages' (Stevenson)³². Just as Green's characters' narratives are repeatedly replaced by alternative narratives, so too is direct narrative exposition itself frequently disrupted by the inclusion of 'alien' materials (letters or notes, telegrams, diaries, other prose texts). Green plays with the idea of hierarchical levels in his texts, blurring the distinctions between main and secondary levels of narrative, ever ready to yield authority from one to the other. His readiness to use composite materials instead of direct narration is already apparent in *Blindness*, which opens with a diary facsimile from June of one year to October of the next (identified as the 'Diary of John Haye, Secretary to the Noat Art Society, and in J. W. P.'s House at the Public School of Noat', pp.3-34). So far, narration merely serves as the medium of quotation. Still without adopting a conventional first or third person narrative, this opening section then concludes with a second insertion, identified as an 'Extract from a letter written by B.G. to Seymour'. This, like the diary, seems to be quoted in full, although the transcript this time trails off ('Blindness, the most...' etc.' (p.35)). Only after this does a primary, third person narrative begin. The text concludes with more transcribed texts: first a letter from Seymour to B.G. (undated and quoted in full, p.144), and then one from John, written sometime after the seizure which marks the end of the main narrative. Both these letters are textual appendices, written to characters who do not appear in the text, and therefore collated by a narrating agency with external privileges of access. The effect Green achieves by this is a triptych, in which the directly narrated text is buttressed by apparent archival transcripts, suggesting that citation of material (supposedly from elsewhere) is no less privileged a strategy than the more formal requirements of direct narrative exposition.

Such insertions play an important part in his work, from the slangy schoolboy idioms of *Blindness*, to Raunce's hesitant letters or the Tennants' cryptic telegrams in

³² *The British Novel since the Thirties: An Introduction* (London: Batsford, 1986), p.81.

Loving, Rose's vulgar notes and a variety of technical letters in *Back*, the cryptic directives veiled in bureaucratic double-talk, and the threatening anonymous letter Edge rips up in *Concluding*. *Back* offers an extended examination of textual insertion: in it not only does the plot hinge on textual insertions, but these 'incorporated genres' moreover repeatedly usurp the business of narration. The text also repeatedly quotes with relish various technical references associated with business, letters elaborately referring to 'Their ref. CM/105/127' and 'Our ref. 1017/2/1826' (p.43), 'in connection with our order number 1528/2/1781' (p.45). A series of written communications direct the narrative: Rose's five letters which so trouble Charley (pp.120-22); the crisis at work which Rob Jordan's business letter to Corker Mead triggers (p.105); and a plethora of notes, some merely mentioned, between characters which advance the action (James' two invitations (pp.83, 119); his accompanying message to the article (p.91); Nancy's note of apology (pp.118-19); the handwriting expert's reply (p.139); Ernie Mandrew's Christmas invitation (p.201); various official paperwork). Three of these - Rose's notes, the business letter, and the memoir which James sends Charley - create important textual pauses, where alternative texts, quoted in full, usurp the narrational level. The most significant of these is the twelve page memoir which, inserted roughly halfway through the novel, effectively splits the text into two halves forming a triptych. Like *Blindness*'s diary the memoir, textually justified as an article in a magazine which James sends to Charley, is quoted in full: Green's narrating agency becomes merely the instrument of citation, quoting it 'as it is printed here' (p.92). The deliberately clumsy shift into the present tense consciously draws attention to the alteration in narrative level, as does the cumbersome textual attribution (the quotation also cites the memoir's title in full: 'From the Souvenirs of Madame DE CREQUY [1710-1800] to her infant grandson [...]'). The difference between this incorporated text and *Blindness*'s, however, is that this time the secondary text is not a product of the narrating agency. This interestingly reverses the literary convention of inserted documents or discovered stories: Green actually *does* insert someone else's text; the memoir actually *is* what the reader initially assumes it merely pretends to be - an apparently autobiographical passage, an anterior text in a different genre; pressed into service, without alteration, in a novel over a hundred years later. And this is not all: Mengham discovered that the 'Souvenir', which was indeed published in England in

1834, was denounced at the time by the *Quarterly Review* as a 'confidence trick', a work of fiction rather than autobiography (Mengham, p.171). So the 'Souvenir' functions on a variety of narrative levels: we have therefore a section excerpted from a highly ambiguous text (an autobiography which might be fiction: given Green's problems with the nature of autobiographical "truth" in *Pack My Bag*, an altogether appropriate indeterminacy), inserted into another text without a note acknowledging the borrowing (Evelyn Waugh, for one, applauded what he assumed was a pastiche, before discovering to his horror that it was nothing of the sort³³). The 'Souvenir's' textual incorporation absorbs the discourse of another, a quintessential abandonment of narrational authority. Moreover, like the prolepses in *Caught*, it threatens to reveal the outcome of the story prematurely.

It also raises interesting questions of voice. For while the 'Souvenir' is the work of another, Green both chose and translated the passage himself, giving him some say in the choice of words and phrasing. And, in a very meta-textual twist, published this very same translation (with a companion excerpt, 'The Waters of Nanterre', which *Back* does not use) in a wartime issue of *Horizon* some four years earlier, under Green's name. James' discovery of it in a literary magazine *during wartime*, therefore, mirrors real-life circumstances and further blurs the distinctions between fiction and reality. Thus the story is, and is simultaneously not, a product of the author; being at once the text of another, yet twice now published under the aegis of this pseudonym, 'Henry Green'. And its thematic self-referentiality is impressive - the 'Souvenir' simultaneously mirrors and structurally partitions the text which encloses it and which it doubles both in terms of plot resolution and theme, just as in a further metaphysical twist it literally mirrors the enclosing text by speaking of a woman lavishing passion on two men 'entirely different and yet [...] exactly similar' (p.104), within a novel which tells of just the reverse, of a man obsessed by the resemblances between two women). And it is, importantly, a translation of another language, taking its place with other alternative languages (bureaucracy and business) in the text.

³³ Waugh wrote indignantly to Green, 'As a matter of literary morals should you not have put a note to this effect. To introduce someone else's [sic] work into your own fiction seems to me reprehensible' (letter dated 12 November 1946, in *The Letters of Evelyn Waugh*, p.239).

That the nature of *Back's* intradiegetic narrative is so peculiarly ambiguous is significant, given Green's fascination with questions of attribution and authority. We can see this again in *Caught's* problematic metanarratives, its extended parenthetical accounts unique to the text which, just as the 'Souvenir' does, usurp and supplant the main narrative level³⁴. The text's two principal events, Christopher's abduction and the Blitz, are both narrated analeptically (the former predating the main narrative; the latter, though chronologically contained within it, is nevertheless elided and narrated in flashback). Both narratives are initially started by Richard, the first as he thinks back to the night of the abduction while travelling by train back to London, and the second as he attempts, walking with Dy in the country, to tell her what he remembers of the first night of the Blitz. Richard's understanding of the abduction is fragmentary ('he *did not know* what Christopher had been through' (p.17)), and his consciously inadequate version is replaced by a secondary, bracketed account, which operates on a quite different narrative level. The text cuts between his prosaic thoughts (how 'the father *imagined* his son' (p.14)) as he goes 'over that store in memory' (p.15), to a contrasting, luridly detailed version which appears in parentheses. These are interspersed by references to Richard 'lying on the cushioned seat' (p.24), their progress interrupted by physical movement (the momentum of the intruded recollections quelled, for example, when he leans 'forward to scratch the calf of his right leg' (p.17)). While his remembering initially creates an analepsis, his narrative is then usurped by competing analeptic accounts.

The Blitz parentheses are even more interesting. Whereas Richard's knowledge of the abduction, a decisive event which he was not present at, is justifiably sketchy and in potential need of elaboration, his failure to narrate the Blitz only a few months later is conspicuous. His 'urge to explain' only produces an 'inadequate description', and this is accordingly interrupted and replaced by a parenthetical account, which twice pointedly restarts the narrative, declaring: '(It had not been like that at all...)' (pp.176, 180). A parenthesis is usually considered subordinate to the main narrative, telling something which could otherwise be omitted. *Caught's* parentheses reverse

³⁴ These parentheses seem to be closely linked to the extremity of *Caught's* situation, and perhaps for this reason they rarely recur in the subsequent novels: *Loving* eschews the method; *Back* and *Concluding* relegate parentheses to an incidental status as mere appendices of narration; and *Nothing* and *Doting* omit all parentheses altogether.

this hierarchy, however, by creating secondary narratives which first compete with and then supplant Richard's monologue. This subverts the text: by choosing not simply to tell the story as a narrational flashback, instead telling it in complicated fashion, through a flashback within a character-motivated analepsis which both interrupts and contradicts it, Green produces what Genette calls a deliberately 'incompatible focalization'. The parentheses threaten

the whole logic of narrative representation. Again and again we have seen this subversion of mood tied to the activity, or rather the presence, of the narrator himself, the disturbing intervention of the narrative source (*Narrative Discourse*, p.211).

In the case of the Blitz parentheses, the intervention raises interesting questions of fixation. They offer a range of possibilities: as a gloss on Richard's account; as an analeptic juxtaposition of present memories with past actuality; or as merely another version, more detailed but not, in this context of narrational crisis, any more reliable. Green leaves it unclear, and the two versions compete with each other for narrative primacy, between 'what he *had* seen' (p.180, my italics); what, two months later, he is able to recall; and these intimations of altogether more obscure narrating. The flashbacks *seem* focalized by Richard, but whether they are indeed his memories remains unclear. These parenthetical observations test the authority of narration itself. Like the periodical manifestations of "superior" narrational voices in the fiction, they point to the existence of a higher textual authority, here intervening ostensibly on Richard's behalf. The immediate effect in *Caught* is to contradict the limited perspectives of the novel's characters, as for example in the parentheses which augment Pye's recollections of his sister's first sexual experience: '(What he did not know was the year after year after year of entanglement before her)' (p.42). Similar supplementary parentheses are intermittently found in earlier novels, more innocuously: in *Blindness* and *Living* as occasional narrational footnotes inserted in diegetic passages; in *Party Going* as interventions which correct (noting, when Alex lies about Max waiting for him, that '(this was not true)' (p.54)), or expand ('(It appears that...)' (pp.21, 82)). But in *Caught* attribution is blurred, just as authority is highly vulnerable throughout. Richard himself, using almost exactly the same words as the later Blitz parentheses, tells Dy that "'I suppose it was not like that at all really. One changes everything after by going over it'" (p.179). The parentheses too,

explicitly, *go over things*, a process which, as *Pack My Bag* suggests, is fraught with danger: narrating events at a later date makes them 'unreliable account[s] of what used to be' (p.8).

Green's parenthetical accounts insert additional textual material, as do the various examples of alternative languages and genres in the fiction. *Pack My Bag* praises the wonderful and strange idiomatic world of working-class factory life with much the same enthusiasm as he remembers his father collecting local dialectic expressions. Reviewing *The Spoken Word as Written*, Green emphasized that 'new turns of phrase as they come up in speech' are the 'tools of the poet and the novelist' ('SWW', p.173). The same love of idiom inspires his polyvoiced texts with their multitude of social registers, narratorial idioms, idiolects, sociolects and borrowed texts ('incorporated genres'), all contending with each other. The later novels are particularly interested in the bizarre languages of business and trade, from the Government communiqué in *Concluding* about pig farms to the technical letters included in *Back*. Green's texts, therefore, are unusually receptive to different languages and the ways in which they function. The differences between the spoken word and written word always interested him from a technical as well as practical point of view. Green also agreed, drawing on his own background in business, to review a Government publication in the 1950s, *The Complete Plain Words* (commissioned in response to growing fears that language in professional life was becoming increasingly incomprehensible to the layman). One such example it quotes, a particularly obtuse internal memorandum, prompts the complaint that

Nobody could say what meaning this was intended to convey unless he held the key. It is not English, except in the sense that the words are English words. They are a group of symbols used in conventional senses known only to the parties to the convention³⁵.

Influenced by his own management experience, Green agreed, in his review article, that business and government alike did seem to be developing their own distinctly peculiar idioms: 'it may well be that every trade is developing a private language of its own' ('CPW', p.186). *Back* sets out to prove this: while Charley Summers

³⁵ Sir Ernest Gowers, *The Complete Plain Words* (London: H.M.S.O., 1954), pp.78-79.

struggles in everyday conversation he talks 'technicalities freely' (p.40). But Nancy does not understand him when, out of context, he speaks to her using a phrase 'from the jargon of production engineers' (p.50). Language and meaning shift from context to context, Green suggests, clearly fascinated by the idea of freshly-coined idioms alternately compelling (for they offer fresh ways of expressing), yet alarming at the same time (since they also threaten to further complicate the writer's task and impede communication).

3.5 PROVISIONAL CONCLUSIONS

We can now make a series of hypotheses about Green's narrative technique in the fiction. The characteristic movement of narrative in Green's fiction is an oscillation between points which often mark extremes of omniscience and ignorance. This is the case both as a general law tracking the progression between *Blindness* and *Doting*, and internally within the texts, which allow surprising inconsistencies within any given novel. The narrations of these texts are socially amphibious, comfortable in a wide range of alternately used sociolects and frequently shifting between upper and lower-class dialects within the space of sentences. In similar fashion Green bewilderingly alternates between contradictory narrational poses, viewing the narrative act in a variety of different ways: as a third person neutral function; as the product of a narrating agency, or a specific first person narrator, or as a situation liable at any moment to be taken over by unlocatable textual voices. Green's narratives are as unstable as the narrative act is problematic for characters and narrating agencies alike. The successful narrative act requires confidence in language's powers to describe and one's own command of it; yet Green's own willingness to describe or narrate is increasingly sabotaged by the steadily abstracting vision and his own doubts and suspicions of the power of language to signify, as outlined in the previous chapter. The threatened authority of language is paralleled by the diminishing and fluctuating authority of narration, which is in his novels increasingly self-conscious, inconsistent and prepared to yield to other forms (reduced to quotation, either of direct discourse or of interpolated texts; or replaced by secondary narratives). Within the texts, authority is never stable and veers

between repeated (if transient) assertions of omniscience, self-conscious linguistic classifications as 'narratorial' voices, and finally the end state of hesitant debility, apparently abdicating all authority beyond transcription. This degree of inconsistency effectively parodies the possibility of being authoritative, as fleeting positions of apparent omniscience, narrations which expose or correct the limited perspectives of the characters they describe, alternate with sequences in which the agent of narration is neither privileged nor any more reliable than any of the characters described. Green's narrative interventions produce not identifiable narrators but instead merely different voices or personalized traits, which periodically assume textual control. Such interventions mimic the very *question* of attribution, voices which confound any attempt to construct a stable or consistent narrational medium. These findings, I suggest, inevitably parallel the problematic nature of identity in the fiction.

Explanation of the erosion and fluctuation of narrative authority in Green's work remains an essentially unexplored area. It is certainly as closely connected to his fascination with the nature of language and the printed text as it is to his habitual scepticism of personality and the stability of the human subject, just as it also owes much to his own dichotomies and personal predilection for the unstable and the unpredictable. And the protean nature of Green's fiction, habitually questioning accepted approaches and styles, ensures the inevitability of the destruction of authority in his work, this internal logic of change which results in the final novels' abstract ideologies and effective renunciation of narrative authority. In the unstable vision, as we have seen, Green's conception of the nature of narration constantly changes along with the narrational idioms, perspectives, access, positioning, linguistic strategies and methods of focalization employed from text to text.

4 NARRATIVE CONSTRUCTION, TIME, AND ORDER BETWEEN *BLINDNESS* AND *CONCLUDING*

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The novels pay careful attention to questions of structure: as Green told Alan Ross, he was always highly conscious when writing of the *proportions* of the text¹. His final novels, as chapter five examines separately in detail, take these concerns to theoretical extremes, as plot becomes, quite deliberately, 'nothing', and textual exposition is entirely structurally-based. What this chapter aims to demonstrate is the striking diversity of Green's fiction in terms of scope, construction and order. I propose to examine the structural effects and implications of Green's novels as far as *Concluding*, first devoting detailed structural analyses to *Living* and *Caught*. These are Green's most structurally complex texts, and they formulate a variety of strategic manoeuvres which, as we shall see, influence his subsequent novels. The particular aspects this chapter will seek to locate are those narrative devices crucial to the formation of the unstable vision: Green's handling of narrative construction and assembly; the temporal disposition of his texts; and the function of linearity in them. These are all key strategies within the unstable vision: Green typically superimposes and overlaps textual units, warps time, and subtly subverts the linear, and masks these major inconsistencies by highly complex plotting and structuring. *Living* and *Caught*'s manipulations can be interpreted, although as we have seen, somewhat inaccurately, as symbolic of either class-difference, or as a stylistic correlative representing the instability of time during war. The same is not true in Green's other novels, where characteristically surreptitious narrative contradictions or incompatible chronologies generate more furtive textual complications, and we shall accordingly assess the presence of these in the remaining fiction.

¹ He stated: 'As to plotting or thinking ahead, I don't in a novel. I let it come page by page, one a day, and carry it in my head. When I say carry I mean the *proportions* - that is, the length. This is the exhaustion of creating. Towards the end of the book your head is literally bursting ('AF', p.243).

As a result of this analysis I hope to show how narrative order and construction in Green's work are fundamentally unstable. The texts repeatedly generate provoking inconsistencies and potentially destructive discrepancies which, I contend, are central to his narrative design. These discrepancies destabilize the relationship between plot and narrative, time and logic, and between different and conflicting narrative levels. They range from the most blatant of mistakes, to highly surreptitious contradictions. And these, like the inconsistent and unstable use of narrative voice, or the erratic deployment of language, are all important constituents of what I define here as an 'unstable aesthetic'. Other characteristic features of Green's narrative structures, such as temporal discordance, narrative duplication, and multiple time-structures, similarly resist the linear and sequential. In order to examine the relationships between events and their textual disclosure the chapter will adopt Genette's terminology, referring to *prolepses* (denoting narrative advances or 'flashforwards' to future events); *analepses* (for narrative movements to anterior events, or 'flashbacks'); and *anachronies* (locating the discordances between narrational order and story order).

4.2 TIME AND STRUCTURE IN GREEN'S FICTION

Temporal strategies in Green's fiction are as significantly varied and differing from one novel to the next as any of his linguistic or mimetic strategies. The unstable vision is nothing if not impartial: virtually no aspect of fiction remains untouched by it, so that his novels are rarely consistently similar in any shape or form. Elements of the structural approach adopted in *Blindness* (1926) - the importance of quoted artifacts, an awareness of textual space and articulations, or the suggestion that the text can be seen as a collage - will resurface throughout the fiction, but most of the text's other strategies do not reappear. The novel actually begins as a diary, includes several quoted letters, and ends with a letter postscript. It has rigid structural demarcations: three numbered and named main sections ('Caterpillar', 'Chrysalis', and 'Butterfly'), subdivided unambiguously into a variety of numbered subsections ('News', 'Her, Him, Them', 'Picture Postcardism', and so on). Each subsection is temporally distinct from the next and often stylistically distinct as well. To counter

the obvious lack of fluidity many of the sections get round this by incorporating extensive 'flashbacks in mind' ('UN', p.257) which complete gaps between units. Like Green's later criticism of the abandoned *Mood*, the novel, with its essentially immobile protagonist, often seems unduly stationary ('just reflections with no action', in Green's opinion ('UN', p.256)).

Living (1929) is radically different. There are still numbered chapters, but these contain a further one hundred and thirty-five unnumbered narrative units of varying length and flexibility. Green later noted that the cinema had 'taught the modern novelist to split up his text into small scenes' ('ENF', p.22), a lesson *Living* strikingly absorbs. These units range from a single sentence minimum to accounts extending over several pages, proclaiming a complicated temporal fluidity far removed from *Blindness*'s cumbersome structural articulations. The text breaks down into three principal movements, and is finished by a coda. The first seventy-six pages (units #1-14, see the structural outline below, section 4.3.1) move between events roughly covering a month or so; units #15-21 (56 pages), contain a greater proportion of iterative summaries narrating events over a summer; after the gap of a week units #22-31 (116 pages) adopt a fixed dramatic chronology of fifteen days. The final unit #32 is iterative and its chronology unspecified. The text, therefore, tends to seesaw between things taking place on specified days or specified times, and events which are either indefinitely assigned temporally, or which belong to an iterative past. Time therefore veers between periods of indeterminacy (a primarily loose, episodic structure linking separate episodes, or iteratively summarizing whole series of like moments - 'and now time is passing' (pp.90, 260)), and occasional sequences of dramatic concentration, which gives a certain elasticity to Green's structure which, as we shall see, exploits potential frictions between formulae of indeterminacy (things happening monotonously 'one morning', 'another night', or 'some other morning') and the events occurring at specific times which sit uneasily, frequently illogically, amidst them.

Yet few of *Living*'s cinematically-inspired, multi-faceted structural and temporal explorations are continued in Green's next novel, *Party Going* (1939). Here Green effects another surprising methodological shift, setting aside the structural intricacies and impressive reach of *Living*, and instead shrinking scope and duration to a few

hours one evening inside of a fog-bound station. What interests Green about this dramatic concentration of both time and place are the frictions which the temporal closeness of story-time and narrational time potentially generate. Apart from 1948's *Concluding*, which is similarly concentrated (covering this time a sample day), this strategy does not reappear in Green's other novels, although these tend to possess, as section 4.5 suggests, specific sequences which offer opportunities for textual overlapping.

The temporal strategies of *Pack My Bag* (1940) and *Caught* (1941) are more easily historicisable, with the effect of war - what Ford Madox Ford, looking back on World War I, called a 'crack across the table of History'² - playing a significant part in Green's strategic shift of approach. Green's imaginative treatment translates the sensation that 'everything is broken-up' into disturbed chronologies which reorder and re-express time: *Pack My Bag* uncertainly modulates between past and present; *Caught* resists linearity to such an extent that its internal chronology, as section 4.4 demonstrates, is frequently unreconstitutable.

The temporal disposition of the fiction after *Caught* is significantly different. Apart from *Concluding* (which is, nonetheless, set in a clearly iterative future), Green's handling of time, excluding his use of strategic fixed temporal sequences, becomes increasingly indefinite: *Pack My Bag*'s prediction that 'the watch may stop' (p.207) seems, as we turn to these texts, to have been strangely prescient. The subsequent novels have for various reasons indistinct chronologies: *Loving* (1945) approximates the timelessness of a fairy-tale; the passage of time in *Back* (1946) is completely eroded by its protagonist's mental confusion: in both cases the historical perspectives of war merely frame where before they had actively disrupted textual chronology. By *Nothing* (1950) and *Doting* (1951) the effective erasure of linearity is complete: Green now emphasizes the geometrical instead of the sequential, making chronology altogether irrelevant. These texts ostensibly move forward in linear fashion, each episode identified as happening after the preceding one: what is absent is any sense of time. The novels progress through repeated structural patterns and contrasts, and little changes from one day to the next. Time itself, Green suggests, has become un compelling.

² Quoted in Stevenson, *British Novel since the Thirties*, p.22.

4.3 STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF *LIVING*

4.3.1 Structural outline

Living's surface organisation extensively cuts and splices between a bewildering array of narrative units. In order to explore the multiple complexities of Green's structure I have reorganized the text according to its principal narrative articulations of time - sequences without significant temporal breaks which proceed in linear fashion. This creates thirty-two textual units (marked as such on the left). Green's own chapters are marked in brackets, followed by the relevant internal textual unit (numbered for ease of reference). This produces the following narrative structure:

- | | |
|----------------|---|
| #1 (pp.1-14) | [1:1-8, 2:1-3] afternoon of the day Richard Dupret first visits the factory; through to the next morning. |
| #2 (pp.14-29) | [2:4-3:4] Lily and Bert, a Friday night at the cinema (2:4); various incidents in Birmingham (2:5); Lily shopping (2:6); another Friday night and the pigeon gets stuck in the window (2:7); Aaron drops the spanner (2:8); the Eames' home (3:1); Bert found time-wasting in the lavatory by Bridges (3:2) and suspended from work for two weeks; another Friday night in cinema (3:3); various discussions about the man recently placed on the lavatory door timing the workers (3:4). |
| #3 (p.30) | [4:1] Richard and his mother in their London house... |
| #4 (pp.30-35) | [4:2-4*] a two day period, apparently following on from 3:4, in Birmingham... |
| #5 (p.35) | [4:4*-5]... cutting back, mid-section (4:4) to follow on from unit #3 'continuing conversation', which turns out to be the evening of the visit to Birmingham which unit #1 has recounted. |
| #6 (pp.37-39) | [4:6-7] Walters and Bridges <i>discussing</i> putting the man on the door (4:6), and an undated vignette about the Eames' (4:7). |
| #7 (pp.40-50) | [5:1-4] a Thursday and Craigan discusses the wire rope parting earlier that day (5:1); Lily and Jim meet Bert out Friday night (5:2), then unspecified: Bridges and Tarver arguing (5:3); Eames and Bentley on his allotment (5:4 - Bert's two week suspension now completed). |
| #8 (pp.50-52) | 5:5 Richard meets Hannah at a London dinner party (a fortnight or so since #5). |
| #9 (pp.52-55) | 5:6 the following Monday night from #7, in the pub; then unspecified scenes: Tarver at tennis club (5:7), then Lily talking about Craigan (5:8). |
| #10 (pp.56-57) | 6:1 Iterative summary of the accident to Old Dupret & Archer's plans for work. |
| #11 (pp.57-60) | [6:2-3] vignette as Tupe tells joke; & a Friday night in the cinema (Lily and Bert) |
| #12 (pp.60-63) | 6:4 Richard at work the following morning from #8, receiving condolences of staff (6:5/6). |
| #13 (pp.63-65) | 6:7 Eames discusses with his wife meeting Bentley on allotment, later on evening 5:4 of unit #7. |

- #14 (pp.65-76) [6:8-9, 7:1-2] Arguments over the cracked bed-plate (6:8/9) on Friday afternoon; Lily and Bert out on the Saturday afternoon (7:1); unspecified vignette of Richard thinking of Hannah (7:2).
- #15 (pp.76-90) [7:3-10] Iterative summary Lily and Bert now going out in summer (7:3/4); lavatory man now removed (7:5/6); two hospital visits of Mrs Dupret to her husband (7:7/8); a Sunday dinner at Craigan's (7:9), and the 'one morning' when Arthur Jones sings in the foundry (7:10).
- #16 (pp.91-93) 7:11 Iterative summary 'And now time is passing': the progress of Old Dupret, his move to the country and subsequent decline; the experiment with the "tart" (& the future: the disgust Dick Dupret feels for the rest of his life).
- #17 (pp.93-96) 7:12 an evening at Craigan's.
- #18 (pp.96-98) 7:13 Richard, one morning in London: 'they hoped to move [Old Dupret] into country tomorrow'.
- #19 (pp.98-105) [7:14-17] 'Another day' Richard learns of wire-rope accident of 5:1 (7:14); 'three months ago'; lunch in Birmingham (7:15); 'after three days' his letter about incident arrives with Bridges (7:16); one Saturday afternoon Lily and Bert spend in the country (7:17).
- #20 (pp.105-7) 7:18 Iterative summary about Old Dupret, leading to his reinstatement of the lavatory man.
- #21 (pp.108-32) [8:1-7, 9:1] Lily and Bert on another Saturday afternoon, now in autumn (8:1); Lily's monologue (8:2); Richard in the country, annoyed at his father and Bridges (8:3); Bridges discusses wire-rope (8:4) and his thoughts 'later' (8:5); Richard's new resolve to work (8:6); at Craigan's (8:7); Hannah and illness of her father over weekend (9:1); 'another night' in different pubs (9:2/3); Richard and Hannah meet at party (9:4); 'Just then Mr Dupret died in sleep' (9:5); Aaron and Albert discuss his death (9:6); Winter and Richard comes to London: condolences of Archer (9:7); Bridges' 'collapse' while Lily goes shopping (9:8); Albert and Joe (9:9); Walters recommends Bridges go on sick-leave to Richard (9:10); Bert and Lily meet at night (9:11).
- #22 (pp.132-43) [9:12-14, 10:1-2] a week later: Monday evening house party with Tom Tyler, sandwiching in scene of Bridges writing letter to work, returning as Richard arrives. Then the Tuesday morning, after breakfast (9:15), and departure of Richard for Birmingham (10:1); that evening, at home with mother, talking about his day (10:2).
- #23 (p.144) 10:3 Iterative summary of Lily's life at present.
- #24 (pp.145-46) 10:4 Tuesday evening (after Richard has left factory) and Bridges' at seaside.
- #25 (p.147) 11:1 parallel time to 10:1, as Hannah stays over from morning to afternoon.
- #26 (pp.147-155) [11:2-7] Bridges gets back Wednesday afternoon (11:2); tells Bert off in the evening (11:3); workers go home (11:4); the 'same evening' Bert and Lily go out (11:5); Craigan's thoughts (11:6); Joe and Tupe in the pub (11:7).
- #27 (pp.155-56) 11:8 Iterative summary of Hannah and Richard, since #25.
- #28 (pp.156-65) [12:1-4, 13:1] Bert at home, probably the Friday ('restless these last two days') (12:1); Lily and Jim to cinema, [Friday] night (12:2); Lily and Bert in country on Sunday (12:3), sandwiching Eames' thinking about Lily (12:4), to resume 'on their Sunday walk, later' (13:1).
- #29 (pp.166-86) [13:2-4, 14:1-7, 15:1] The Duprets invite Hannah (13:2) and she comes on Monday night (13:3); Richard by the Thames that Tuesday morning (13:4), and onto London offices that afternoon (14:1); 'Meanwhile' Craigan takes to his bed (14:2), and Lily and Bert go to the cinema (14:3); Richard visits Birmingham on the Wednesday (14:4); Jim reflects on half-time on Thursday afternoon (14:5) while 'that day' Richard talks to Bridges (14:6); Mrs Eames calls on Craigan [Friday] morning (14:7), while Bridges talks again to Richard before lunch (15:1).
- #30 (pp.186-95) [15:2-6, 16:1] FRIDAY: back to morning, parallel time with 14:7, 'while Mrs. Eames visited Craigan' (15:2); Richard and Lily pass in the street at lunch time

- (15:3), Lily continuing down road (15:4), prepares food over afternoon (15:5); a brief vignette between Craigan and Jim (15:6), and back to Lily, leaving home to see Bert at the Johns' Friday evening (16:1).
- #31 (pp.195-248) [16:2/3, 17:1-4, 18:1-3, 19:1-3, 20:1-4] Iterative: Bert's position and back to Friday afternoon at work (16:2); Richard announces men will be pensioned off (16:3). SATURDAY: morning montage (17:1); Craigan's thoughts (17:2); Lily and Bert out walking/ Craigan at home that afternoon (17:3); Lily returns home by evening and Joe is arrested (17:4). SUNDAY: Lily and Bert set off from station for Liverpool (18:1-3, including cut back to Craigan at home within 18:2); "What is a town" narration of Liverpool (19:1), sandwiching scene 'At this time' Jim and Craigan worrying about Lily (19:2), returning to Liverpool and abandonment (19:3). MONDAY night Lily cries at home (20:1); TUESDAY morning Craigan brings her tea (20:2); 'later' she wakes up and tells her version (20:3); she goes to buy food and Mrs Eames calls (20:4).
- #32 (pp.249-69) [20:5, 21:1-5] Joe is released 'some days later' [=the next Tuesday] and sent to find Jim (20:5); 'later that evening' finds him at factory (21:1); a Monday night at the pub, iterative summary of life now, Craigan headbutts Joe (21:2); 'And now time is passing' iterative summary (21:3); a Friday evening and Saturday morning: Aaron calls to go to Villa game, Lily goes to the Eames' (21:4); Lily and Mrs Eames' niece with baby (21:5).

4.3.2 Divergence between text and story

Even a cursory glance at this plan reveals strange irregularities. Two main points emerge: that the order of the text is much more problematic than appears while reading the text; and that the internal organisation which Green supplies, these numbered chapters, is completely misleading. If we reconstruct the order of narrated events as closely as possible the following, significantly different story, emerges:

#1 (including #3 then #5), #2 (including #6), #4, #7, #13, then two irreconcilable parallel sequences: (a) factory life #9, #11 and #12/ then (b) "Dupret" sequence #8, #12 [and unit #10 which lacks explicit connection to either narrative sequence]. In unit #12 these two sequences realign: continuing #14, #15, #16 (including #18); #17, #19-21, #23?, #22 (including #25), then #24. #26 and the iterative #27 cover approximately the same time zone: #27 then advances to the point where #29 resumes. Finally, #28-31 form, with some overlaps, a continuous sequence, while #32 is a separate concluding unit.

Any impression that the text, during its reading, proceeds in more or less linear fashion is revealed to be an illusion: the array of episodes, numerous secondary characters, and proliferating detail conceal serious problems of order and temporal inconsistencies. There is first of all no correlation between the text's temporal divisions (its chapters) and its significant chronological or spatial shifts. Nor do the gaps between individual units or from chapter to chapter distinguish between

important and unimportant spatio-temporal articulations. Secondly, this analysis fully brings out the extent of the text's dual structuring, showing the complicated relationship between these twin non-concordant sequences covering the different worlds of workers and bosses. The text directly exploits problems of temporal inconsistency, just as awkwardly as these quite separate worlds integrate with each other. Dick Dupret is the go-between, like Green himself moving between factory life and his hereditary world of social privilege, and it is with his arrivals and departures that the two sequences tend to connect.

This policy of dual structuring creates interesting effects over the course of the first three chapters. Units #1 and #2 advance, from a composite account of Richard's first trip to the foundry, through a series of random events in time spanning a period of around three weeks in Birmingham. Unit #3 (marked as chapter four in the text) starts with a scene in which Richard discusses social engagements with his mother. Episodes (4:2 to 4:4) resume in the Birmingham sequence, apparently at a later date than (3:4), and cover a few days chronologically. Yet, on page 35, when the text cuts unannounced in the middle of episode (4:4) back to the Duprets, it is 'continuing conversation', while the next segment (4:5) reveals that Richard's trip to the foundry has, crucially, only taken place earlier that day. Unit #5 is therefore a continuation of unit #3, forming a textual pause which sandwiches this spatially and temporally incompatible series of scenes, covering moreover almost four weeks in the foundry, while the Dupret sequence (units #1, #3 and #5) remains on the opening day of the narrative.

A similar effect is achieved between units #8 and 12. The "bourgeois" narrative resumes with a dinner party in London, around two weeks since the last sequence following Dick's movements. Unit #9, disregarding this, returns to the "workers" sequence on the Monday following unit #7; while unit #11 advances to another Friday night at the movies. The period covered spans at the very minimum a week, although when unit #12 returns to Dick Dupret it is only the following morning after the party (6:4). And this is without taking into account unit #10 (6:1), which iteratively narrates Old Dupret's accident. This takes place, textually, between the dinner party (unit #8) and the following day at work (unit #12), although this proves to cause serious problems. The accident has clearly not happened before the dinner

party (for young Dupret makes no reference to it), despite the fact that his departure for Birmingham, only the next morning, is a direct consequence of it (6:4). Unit #10 also iteratively reaches well into the future, recording how Richard now comes ‘early every morning’ to work in London, although unit #12 is logically the first time this happens. This manipulation of time is consistent with narrative logic (Richard goes to the party; his father has an accident; his life alters to leave him ‘in charge of business’ (p.56)), but chronologically impossible: story-time and actual time do not coincide. Another example of unit #10’s iterative reach is its disclosure of Archer’s plans to implement changes at work, which he then mentions for the first time in unit #12 (6:5).

Both of these dual structures show how the text of *Living* creates colossal textual loops between these two sequences. This lack of connection is deliberate: Green’s point is that the two worlds are basically incompatible. At one point, underlining this, the principal protagonists of each sequence briefly pass each other on the street, their paths intersecting but not, appropriately, connecting (Dick passes Lily without noticing her since ‘she was so like the others’ (15:3, pp.187-88))³. The problems of temporal integration between the two main sequences also employ the typical modernist concept that time is experienced individually, subjectively moving at different rates for different people. In the foundry, Dick Dupret suggests, time passes ‘quickly for them, in a rhythm’ (p.187), whereas it sits heavily on him and his kind in the novel. *Living*’s structure, with those short temporal segments of the “bourgeois” sequence, and contrasting weeks passed in the foundry, clearly illustrates this.

The unease of connection is further stressed by Green’s use of montage, cutting between these two worlds and therefore highlighting the differences between them. Oddvar Holmesland’s montage-based reading of Green’s work argues the ‘vital balance of opposites’ in an art which is essentially juxtapositional (Holmesland, p.222). As he states, there is a ‘close connection between [Green’s] dynamic realization and the effect of film’ (p.vii), particularly apparent in *Living*, which structurally benefits enormously from cinematic cutting and assembly. Indeed, the cultural importance of cinema-going is internally acknowledged within, as Green

³ Following this highly symbolic failure to connect the text, with the sole exception of Richard’s decision in (16:3) to pension off the older workers, will be entirely concerned with the “workers” sequence. This, covering pages 188-269, comprises a substantial portion of the novel.

notes approvingly the solidarity of 'battalions in cinemas over all the country' (p.59)⁴. Montage, Eisenstein's '*kino-fist*', juxtaposing conflicting images symbolizing class inequalities, offers pointed class-distinctions throughout Green's fiction, typically separating things 'inside' and 'outside'. In *Party Going* repeated cross-cuts juxtapose Miss Fellowes' illness against the party-goers' unwillingness to acknowledge her lest she hinder their departure⁵. The privileged latter, sealed off in their warm, luxury suites in the hotel, periodically glance through the windows down at the less-fortunate masses stuck in the crowded station, and Green cuts repeatedly between those commuters 'Down below' and his idle travellers 'Upstairs', or 'away above' (there are even hierarchies within the hotel rooms Max books on different levels). The text actually echoes the famous scene in *Living* when Lily and Richard's paths accidentally cross in the street: Julia, looking for her bags, unwittingly passes her manservant Thomson, hurrying with them, in the fog ('And as she turned back Thomson went by with her luggage [...] She did not know, and he did not know she was there' (p.19)). *Loving*, this time reversing the vantage points, again uses spatial positions to draw class distinctions. So that here it is the servants who occupy the vantage point: we twice find Edie and Kate up in the attic looking down below at their employers, who they observe but cannot hear: Edith looks out, sees the Tennants a 'great distance beneath' (p.24), upon which the narrative segues into their dialogue, a trick repeated when the girls later observe Mrs Jack and the Captain ('They could not hear their masters', Green emphasizes (p.40)).

4.3.3 Internal chronological discrepancies

Up to a point, therefore, many of the temporal distortions can be justified as a product of these social juxtapositions. However, this leaves a range of chronological inconsistencies which are not attributable to this class-inspired bourgeois/ proletarian

⁴ Green was, of course, an avid cinema-goer, and *Pack My Bag* carefully connects cinema-going with novel-writing, recalling an adolescence spent at the movies (going 'every day [...] alone to a cinema after which I tried to write' (p.201)).

⁵ 'For every step Angela and Julia took', the text pointedly notes, 'Miss Fellowes was taken up one too' as she is carried prostrate into the hotel. The distinction is spatially reinforced: they enter through the front, but she is secretly brought in round the back (p.63).

divide. Warps of time, much like the apparently 'proletarian idiom' which strays well beyond the foundry, have a much wider textual application. Apparently straightforward sequences of events are also chopped up and narrated in non-linear fashion. The first instance of this comes with the lavatory saga, which begins in unit #2. Bridges finds Bert smoking in the toilet, and suspends him for two weeks (3:2). This incident is then hotly debated in the works between first Joe and Craigan, then Aaron and Bentley (3:4), as they discuss the indignities of being timed going to the toilet by the man who has, in the meantime, been posted there. But, when the Birmingham sequence resumes (unit #6, 4:6) after the disruption of the Dupret dinner episodes, it is to a clearly antecedent point, since Walters and Bridges are still only discussing putting this man by the door (p.38). This analeptic sequence therefore repositions the narrative somewhere between sections 3:2 and 3:4. This has the curious effect of observing the men's outrage ("Seein' we're animals 'e's got to treat us as animals" (p.28)) at a decision which the management have not even implemented. This illogical reversal of order has the effect of implying that management decisions are made irrespective of popular opinion - as indeed, the later pensioning-off of veteran workers bears out.

A similar effect is achieved in the second of the largely iterative Old Dupret sections (unit #16), which is just as temporally problematic as the earlier one (unit #10). This section also integrates awkwardly with the main text, drifting unchecked into the iterative future ('now time is passing'), as it relates Old Dupret's continued decline and his family's unsuccessful attempts, culminating in the move to the country, to arrest this. However, the next section to return to the Duprets (unit #18) reveals that this move has in fact not yet happened, when Richard tells Archer that 'they hoped to move him into country tomorrow' (p.96). Like the workers' outrage at a decision yet to be taken, the move to the country also precedes its finalization, another clear manipulation of narrative linearity. Unit #16, therefore, starts off as simply analeptic (bringing Old Dupret up to date since last mentioned, in unit #10), but becomes proleptic, exceeding its rightful textual position and clashing with the rest of the text.

Another subsidiary sequence which uneasily integrates with the main text concerns the Eames'. In the very last scene of unit #7, episode 5:4, Mr Eames chats

to Bentley on his allotment garden, during the course of which it transpires that Bert has returned to work. A substantial period of time then elapses (between 5:5 and 6:6) before the text returns to the Eames' in 6:7, yet this segment finds them discussing the conversation with Bentley earlier that evening on the allotment. It is the same narrative ploy, of course, as before with the Duprets discussing Richard's day at the factory, here sandwiching units #8 to #12.

Green sophisticatedly juggles with textual structure, and additional contradictions emerge upon rereading. Particularly interesting, and significant for the fiction, is the concentrated time sequence between units #22 to #31. This, covering a specific fifteen day period, is the first of several experimental fixed chronologies in the fiction. It contains a cluster of iterative sequences, essentially bringing secondary characters up to date, which typically start in an analeptic past before straying, well beyond their correct textual position, into an iterative future, generating obvious problems of chronological unity. Genette calls these 'mixed' analepses, exceeding the temporal positions reached in the framing text. Unit #22 starts with the Monday house party and concludes on the evening of the next day. Unit #23, however, is iterative ('Now, as has been said, evenings were drawing in' (pp.143-44), and summarizes how Lily's relationship with Bert is progressing. Units #24 to #26 return to the fixed chronology, recording scenes between Tuesday and Wednesday evening, finishing with Joe and Tupe in the pub on the same day that Bert is told off at work (11:7); while unit #28 (which starts chapter 12) advances to the end of the week, describing how Bert has felt 'restless these last two days' following the reprimand. Amidst this, however, Green includes a further episode from the "bourgeois" sequence (unit #27), which analeptically narrates how Hannah's relationship with Tom Tyler has foundered over a period of time, amidst 'party after party in country houses' (p.155). Several curious overlaps are created in this 'fixed' sequence. In episode (14:7) Mrs Eames sets off to see Craigan on the Friday morning. The next scene, which starts chapter 15, continues in the foundry as Bridges talks to Dick Dupret before lunch. Yet episode (15:2) stops this sequence by realigning the text to parallel (14:7), which the narration specifically draws attention to, stating that it is still only 'Friday morning, while Mrs Eames visited Mr Craigan' (p.186, section 15:2). The rest of the chapter continues over the afternoon, moving into the evening,

as Lily leaves home to see Bert, with the opening scene of chapter 16. Yet the next scene (16:2) iteratively returns to Bert at work earlier that afternoon ('And now for Mr Jones his position was this' (p.195)), and from there to Richard, again at some point in the afternoon, informing Walters that all the old men will be pensioned off the following day (pp.197-98). The text therefore repeatedly doubles back on itself, although there is no immediate logical explanation for this. And then there is the internal contradiction of Craigan's illness: he takes to his bed on the Tuesday (14:2), and gets up again on the following Saturday - having mysteriously spent 'three weeks in bed' (17:2, p.206). In similar fashion Bridges reminds his wife, at the seaside on the Monday, that "'it ain't November yet'", although Dick Dupret strangely wonders, the following Tuesday, at 'what a new year' it is (pp.135, 170).

This mirrors an earlier overlap, between units #22 and 26. Section (9:15) describes the following morning from the house party, and continues in (10:1) as Dick, 'leaving house-party [...] went to Birmingham' (p.139). Section (10:2) sees him back in London, talking about Hannah to his mother. A retrospective sequence then takes places, iteratively describing how 'evenings were drawing in' (10:3, p.144), while (10:4) presents an undated episode, featuring Bridges on sick-leave at the seaside. At this point, however, the text reorientates itself to return to the same time as (10:1), as Hannah stays 'over into next day' (11:1, p.147), so that only in (11:2) does the text once again resume in sequence: again, another unnecessary reorientation is caused by overlapping sequences.

4.3.4 Conclusions about spatial coordination

Living offers several pointers to Green's handling of narrative and time in his subsequent fiction. First of all, it demonstrates his increasing readiness to experiment with, or abandon altogether, narrative linearity (reflected in the text's progressive abandonment of visible or logical demarcations). Secondly, it shows how Green uses discrepancies and awkward connections to destabilize the text's structure.

The linear aspects of narrative fascinated Green. The fiction's syntactical freedom represents one aspect of his striving against linearity, in his refusal to conform to

established grammatical rules: the linguistic deletions create their own form of textual space in these theoretical gaps where words or parts of sentences would normally be found; while the unconventional clause-usage, redundant continuatives, reversals of word order similarly resist the sequential flow of text.

The layout of Green's novels reflects on their unpredictable coordination. None of the subsequent novels typographically mark divisions: instead unmarked textual units of varying length are divided by blank spaces of varying amounts - larger indentations, with half, even occasionally completely blank pages of text which loosely correspond to conventional chapters; the rest, much shorter, apparently denoting less significant textual demarcations. It is important to note how unpredictable textual gaps are in the fiction, which do not differentiate between considerable lapses of time and brief narrational pauses. That Green intends them to be unreliable temporal divisions is apparent when, disconcertingly, he elsewhere uses blank spaces to pause dialogues which then resume as if nothing had happened (*Lo*, p.107; and *Co*, p.41). Such blank spaces create their own redundant, non-existent times; others accelerate over 'dead' spaces, temporal zones which nothing significant happens according to the agendas of Green's narrating agencies. Gaps are also used to generate hermeneutic problems: skipping important events or eliding significant information; or by their very imprecision creating chronological problems of order. And so the reader's attention, deprived of any other form of textual demarcation, becomes imaginatively focused on these blank zones, which therefore become areas of intense interest⁶. The structural geometries of *Nothing* and *Doting* offer illusory ways of mapping textual spaces by relentlessly flattening them and using blank space as an obvious metaphor for the void (a comparison echoed in the repeated enclosures and myopic environments of the fiction, from the backgrounds obscured by fog to the subterranean city in *Caught*).

4.3.5 Towards an unstable aesthetic

⁶ We can compare this to Green's treatment of space within the novels. His characters, for example, experience great difficulties with space, jealously creating their own personal spaces. Many of them seem profoundly agoraphobic, appropriately so in these texts obsessed with metaphors of entrapment or menacing spaces, narrated by myopic or unseeing narrating agencies.

Living's structural discrepancies inevitably bring the reader into familiar territory: what purpose do they achieve or intend? The text's problems of order and duration certainly go well beyond the basic principle that class incompatibility justifies dual structures operating in different time-scales. Their unpredictability, like the eccentric linguistic strategies (see section 3.2.5), is far from logically applied. Nor does Green borrow the modernist strategy of using individual characters' perceptions to justify temporal distortions: the text's illogical constructions and strangely-fitting sequences are not subordinated to anyone's distortions of memory, therefore resisting chronological recuperation.

Authorial carelessness is not the answer either. Granted, Green often displays temporal indifference, an attitude which certainly prevails in the later fiction with its formulae of maddeningly indistinct, irrelevant statements of time. And, as the next section demonstrates, *Caught* shows how cavalierly he mixes historical time, narrative time, and the emotional reality of his characters. Many of the smaller inconsistencies are quite possibly unintentional. But this is not to say that Green is not fascinated with achronic effects, or that their presence in the fiction is ever innocent. For Green believed that

if the novel *is* alive of course the reader will be irritated by discrepancies - life, after all, is one discrepancy after another ('AF', pp.244-45).

'Try and write out a scheme or plan', Green states, 'and you will only depart from it. My way you have a chance to set something living' ('AF', p.243). Textual errors, according to this approach, are not only inevitable but also desirable. In the unstable vision, he argues, narratives *should* fit awkwardly together in order to come 'alive': the textual inconsistencies and errors of the literary text therefore necessarily duplicate the confusions of life. Structural instability is an essential component of Green's stylistic approach, since provoking textual contradictions counteract the reader's complacency at the same time as they destroy linearity (in this approach we can already see the predilections which would result, in the final novels, in Green's progression towards the radical scepticism of the *nouveaux romanciers*⁷). His texts

⁷ Alain Robbe-Grillet, for instance, directly echoing Green, wrote that: 'the more contradictions the

certainly include many deliberate errors as well as possibly inadvertent ones: Green's point being that an intentional mistake and an accidental mistake are just as effective as each other. As we have seen with the changes Green was forced to make to *Caught*, apparent carelessness can and does have a positive value in his otherwise carefully-crafted fiction. This alternation between overt errors and covert ones tests the reader's mettle: the closer you read, the more you discover. Some of the 'errors' are, as we shall see, deliberately highlighted by the narrative function; others only emerge with careful rereading.

The fundamental effect of this is, like Green's use of textual construction, somewhat paranoid - an altogether appropriate effect for a body of fiction often explicitly concerned with paranoid coincidences. The more the reader is alerted to errors and inconsistencies, the more strange connections and disconnections emerge. The obvious contradictions, such as the dual time sequences of *Living*, focus the reader's attention on structure, prompting the discovery of ever more peculiar and surreptitious errors, which soon appear boundless. Contradictions, of course, are as Gibson puts it, merely 'one aspect of a larger expressive disorder' (*RND*, p.11). We shall see such glaring inconsistencies and temporal liberties in overlapping sequences in *Party Going*, *Loving* and *Back*.

4.4 STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF *CAUGHT*

4.4.1 Structural outline

Caught's structural peculiarities are of an altogether different nature. The novel follows *Party Going* in dividing the text into a series of unnumbered sections, or 'chapters'. In this case there are no smaller subdivisions, so that the text is comprised of just fifteen distinct narrative units, separated by blank textual spaces. We have seen how *Living*'s chapter divisions are for the most part arbitrary; those in *Caught*,

book as a whole contains, the more true to life it will be' ('Nature, Humanism, Tragedy', in *Snapshots and Towards a New Novel*, trans. by Barbara Wright (London: Calder and Boyars, 1965), pp.75-95 (85).

however, are more subtle, corresponding - if somewhat inaccurately - to significant temporal units. Organisational discord is, therefore, more covert. However, as the summary below demonstrates, there is nothing straightforward about the text's structure, which incorporates dramatic shifts in time and linearity⁸. Not only are the units narrated out of sequence, but they are further disrupted by repeated internal analeptic and proleptic internal movements.

- | | |
|-----------------|---|
| #1 (pp.5-24) | Summary early days of conflict, 'When war broke out in September'.
Richard Roe's first 48 hour leave in late November/ December 1939.
[analepsis to: his memories of the training period between September and December 1938]
[[and the abduction, sometime amidst the above analepsis (including a competing textual parenthetical account of this)]] |
| #2 (pp.24-27) | Roe's second 48 hour leave, early 1940, trying to recall this first leave (seven weeks after #1).
[including: first prolepsis to the Blitz] |
| #3 (pp.27-29) | time of narration not specified (sometime after #2), but consisting of a series of recollections of the A.F.S. in the early months of mobilisation (September 1938-December 1939), and anticipating his next leave (#4).
[including: second prolepsis to the Blitz] |
| #4 (pp.29-34) | Roe's first annual leave, a week in February 1940. |
| #5 (pp.34-51) | the first three days at the substation, 1-3 September 1939, then later that month.
[reaching back to the previous evening, 31 August, and mobilisation]
[Pye's pre-war memories]
[including: third (brief) prolepsis to the Blitz] |
| #6 (pp.51-57) | Piper's home life, an evening sometime in September 1938. |
| #7 (pp.57-67) | in the substation kitchen, the third week of September 1939; then iterative section drawing background of first weeks of war.
[reaching back to: Roe's memories of his wife] |
| #8 (pp.67-78) | Wal's farewell party, one evening late September or October 1939.
[reaching back to: Prudence's fondness for firemen, an incident five years ago] |
| #9 (pp.78-98) | three days montage in November 1939: Mrs Howells goes adrift.
[including: fourth prolepsis to the Blitz (this time November 1940)] |
| #10 (pp.98-113) | 'Three weeks later' / but in fact directly continuing the third day as above (Roe and Hilly out at night, reaching back to earlier that same day). |
| #11 (pp.113-34) | covering: Mrs Howells arriving in Doncaster on the evening of second day and her return to the substation on evening of fifth day (analepsis to: earlier that day): then a second montage sequence of confused chronology.
then: iterative period sometime after, following her appearance before Dodge. |
| #12 (pp.134-54) | iterative period between early 1940 (starting where #2 finishes), covering Pye's second visit to the asylum and Christopher's visit to the substation. |

⁸ The marked units on the left should not be confused with Green's own divisions. His 'chapters' 1 and 2 (pp. 5-10, 11-24) represent one continuous scene, which can be labelled unit #1. Section 3 and unit #2 are the same, but Section 4 (pp. 27-34) contains two distinct units, #3 and #4. Then there is an extended period of convergence - sections 5-10 equal units #5-10. But as time warps about Pye, so too do sections 11-14 start to depart slightly from significant time articulations: section 11 (pp.113-32), section 12 (pp.132-44), section 13 (pp.144-62), and section 14 (pp.162-172) all fail to correspond with the units of time as detailed below. And, as before, the two systems synchronize with the final section 15 which equals unit #14.

- #13 (pp.154-72) iterative period between May 1940 and June 1940, then the moonlit night during which Pye picks up a stray boy.
- #14 (pp.172-96) Roe on sick-leave, mid-November 1940: brief summary of return, then a walk, three days later, with Dy and Christopher.
[analepses to: his account of the first night of the Blitz, 9 September 1940 (plus the competing parenthetical accounts of this); and Pye's suicide in June 1940]
[brief prolepsis to November 1941]

Rearranging these sequences into linear order - that is, according to their *primary* narrational level - produces the following:

#6, #5, #7, #8, #9, #10/ then #11 in parallel time (beginning amidst #9 to continue beyond #10), #1 (although this seems to belong before #9-11: the time frame is fractured), #2, #12 (including #3 & #4), #13-14.

Caught therefore directly challenges and fractures chronological order, destroying narrative linearity. The text's non-sequential construction and complex internal cross-referencing prolepses and analepses effectively erase conventional distinctions between events past, present and future.

The text commences with three sequences (units #1, 2 and 4), narrating three separate periods of wartime leave for Richard, mixed in with an analeptic section (unit #3) which looks back to his pre-war training as an auxiliary fireman. Not before unit #5, in which the main narrational level (life in an A. F. S. sub-station between 1939 and 1940) commences, does it become clear that the previous sections have been narrated out of temporal context, included well in advance of the main narrative's chronology (the text indeed later on catches up with these prematurely-narrated sections; unit #12 explicitly starts where unit #2 finishes, with Richard returning from his second leave). Unit #5, which commences with the call to mobilisation in September 1939, nevertheless also proves to be a false start⁹, as the next section reaches back again in time to another period well before the war which forms the primary scope of the text. This temporally self-contained novella presents an episode from Piper's home life, around twelve months earlier. In such fashion Green's narrative frustrates linearity, and not until unit #7, after fifty-six pages of

⁹ The sequence itself is distinctly non-linear: it starts with Richard and Piper in the bar on the second day after mobilisation, but then cuts back to the immediate past 'three days before war broke out' (p.35) and narrates this mobilisation, before uneasily returning to the main level again, as it tells how Richard 'did not care until the evening of the next day, until, *as he was listening to Piper in the pub*' (p.37, my emphasis), at which point the text resumes where it had left off.

fragmented temporal units, does the text finally commence and proceed in more or less linear fashion. This primary diegetic level is then maintained (allowing for intermittent anachronic disruptions and chronological warps) from September 1939 to early summer 1940 (unit #12). The novel then ends with a flourish (unit #13), eliding the text's defining moment (the Blitz) and instead advancing to Richard, convalescing at home in the country, narrating the Blitz to his wife in a series of complicated flashbacks.

The immediate structural effect is interesting. *Caught*, like *Party Going* and *Pack My Bag*, resists starting. Green later told Alan Ross that he always rewrote the

first twenty pages over and over again [...] as I go along and the book develops, I have to go back to that beginning again and again ('AF', p.242).

Party Going celebrates the very idea of not getting anywhere (and in so doing also metaphorically reflects its own troubled genesis, reworked for almost a decade); the autobiography, equally perturbed by time, moves unsteadily between present and past concerns and frequently requires reorientation. There are several potential hypotheses for *Caught*'s reluctance to begin: some form of mimetic reproduction of pre-Blitz waiting (strongly conveyed within the text); a reluctance to incorporate a traumatic present (the events 'too close' which so worry the autobiography (*PMB*, p.236)); Green's own interest in unstable, non-linear narrational levels. Having finally started to narrate the events of the war it takes almost eighty pages for *Caught*'s principal diegetic level to advance, in unit #9, beyond the first month of war. Then the narrative is constantly delayed by analeptic and proleptic insertions, generating a variety of textual loops. There are the events told out of sequence and then caught up with at a later textual point; these repeated restarts; the recurrent cross-references to the Blitz; and an overall structural motion in which the final unit (#14) symbolically brings the text full-circle, the novel finishing as it starts, almost exactly one year later, with Richard again on leave.

4.4.2 Manipulations of time and history

In *Caught* 'only London in 1940 is real', and Green's narrative freely refers to the actual historical events of that year as the background to the text. These create their own problems of integration, generating additional discrepancies between narrational order and story-line, so that the text becomes "caught" in a triangular relationship between story, narration and history. The war effectively 'unravels' time (p.34), repeatedly warping it with abrupt accelerations and decelerations, sudden jumps and contradictory time-sequences. In *Living* time passes differently for workers and bosses; in the face of war's formidable disruptions *Caught* assumes that it has become inoperative. *Pack My Bag* fears that 'the watch may stop'; *Caught* uses history in cavalier fashion, specifically twisting it out of shape around Pye, whose increasingly impaired efficiency is systematically paralleled by the events of an outside world equally dramatically pushed out of joint. Each historical disaster symbolically mirrors 'the peril' which draws 'closer and heavier' about him (p.122). The evening after Mary returns to work Piper tells Richard that Trant has decided to report her; she is then shortly afterwards summoned; and 'soon after' Trant in turn officially reprimands Pye. This chain of events, taking place in early 1940 (for Richard is only coming 'back after his second spell of leave' (p.134)), reduces the sub-officer to such a state that he becomes 'too disturbed to notice the invasion of Norway', and 'day by day' gets 'more and ever more behind' (p.132). The decline in food and then morale in the sub-station after Pye inadvertently provokes Eileen into resigning coincide with growing public criticism, with the worsening 'news from Norway' in the background (p.136). However, reverses which logically take place over a period of time are crammed into an impossibly short textual duration. Pye's second visit to the asylum, which takes place 'some days since he had been told off by the D. O.' (p.137), is chronologically ambiguous. Pye sets off 'after the first long winter of war' (p.142), a statement which suggests that spring is approaching. This is consistent with the historical positioning of the Norwegian crisis; however, Pye also notes the 'still winter grass' of a 'false spring, just one of those days come much too early, a break in the weather' (pp.138, 137). His final disintegration is set against the background of the 'invasion of the Low Countries' (p.154, May 1940). Progressive disasters over the coming months seal his fate: the snub over his handling of Piper is 'about the time of Weygand's stand' (p.155, early June 1940); as France steadily

crumbles he lurches from one official reprimand to the next; his decision to “abduct” a stray boy off the streets takes place during ‘the evacuation of Dunkirk’ (p.165). Pye is therefore literally *caught* in history, his deterioration a mirroring of the Allies’ position, as first Poland, then Norway, the Low Countries and finally France all fall. He commits suicide at Britain’s bleakest hour, ‘oppressed’ by the ‘menace in the streets’ (p.165).

4.4.3 Internal chronological discrepancies

Just as *Living*’s structure incorporates inexplicable errors, so too does *Caught* generate chronological confusion from contradictory details. An excellent example of this comes in another of Green’s fixed sequences between units #9 and 12. On the first day of this sequence, which takes place in November, Brid turns up at her mother’s door, and the sub-station has its first disastrous call-out. Following this Mary returns to work distraught and Pye, misreading the situation and with worries of his own, gives her the impression that she has been given permission to take time off. The following day, Day 2, both leave, Pye to the asylum and Mary for Doncaster. The ‘next morning’, Day 3, Pye discovers her ‘adrift’, and blames Richard for getting into trouble over his own absence from work (p.88); there is then a gap of ‘several days’ (p.92) before Richard feels ‘the backwash’ and seeks advice from Hilly (bringing the text up to approximately Day 5). Unit #10 then begins as Richard asks Hilly out ‘Three weeks later’ (p.98), yet in the course of their conversation it emerges that Mary has still only been ‘adrift’ at that point for two days (for she explains ‘how Pye had covered Mary for a day, and posted her sick after that’ (p.102)). The text, cutting back to ‘Only that morning’, then confirms that this is indeed correct: Piper betrays to Trant Pye’s tangle over Mary, “‘on the two mornin’s”” (p.105), making it, once more, Day 4 in this sequence. The narrative, now following Mary’s chronology, analeptically returns in unit #11 to her arrival in Doncaster (Day 2), then onto the second day of absence (‘The next day she went back’ (p.115)). We then learn that, upon arriving back in London (Day 3), Brid’s behaviour ‘so upset Mary that she did not go to work at the substation for two days more’, at which point she resumes her

duties, giving Piper 'an egg on the side, extra' (p.116), on what is logically Day 5. At this point, therefore, the text resynchronizes itself again, as it resumes where unit #10 had paused. 'At that instant' we then cut locations, to Richard sleeping with Hilly 'on leave, and for only the second time' (p.117). In Iago's phrase, this all might be described as happening in dilatory time: Richard and Hilly's sequence at once takes place amidst the fixed sequence of five days, yet also over a considerable period of time, encompassing those three weeks before they first go out, let alone the three days grace between their first and second dates (for time off at this period is calculated on the basis of working three days on duty for two days off, 'a practice that was not begun until well into November' (p.63)). This is quite incompatible with the framing sequence detailing Mary's narrative, just as the historical references to Pye's situation occur during the 'lull of living, before the enemy went into Norway' (p.122), a curiously distant reference to events not happening until March the following year. Similarly, the night before this fixed sequence commences, as Pye lies on his bed, imagining his trip to the asylum, the narration agency cross-refers the moment to Richard also lying down, 'coming back from his first leave, in six weeks' time' (p.85, referring back to unit #1). This too is logically impossible, for Mrs Howells goes adrift sometime in November, although Richard's leave, as a result of those shift changes, must be dated between late November and early December.

Whenever Green's texts employ fixed chronologies profound internal disorder results. The compression and elongation of time is a standard narrative ploy which, in *Caught*, Green's narration makes no attempt to conceal. When Pye telephones Prudence for the last time the evening he returns from the asylum the narrative admits that in fact it only '*might have been* the same day' (p.142, my emphasis) - just as another nail in Pye's coffin, the accidental encounter with Dy and Christopher at the sub-station on the morning of the electrician's visit, will also take place only '*about* this time' (p.144). This proves to be an important equivocation, since the latter visit precipitates another deeply divergent double chronology. On the one hand, and over an unspecified period of time, Piper lets 'fall so many hints' about the abduction that it grows, 'and grew in a short time, for there was not much time left' (pp.150-51). When the text returns to Pye, however, it transpires, as he telephones Prudence, that he has only just finished with the electrician. Dramatic time and

textual time operate on different levels, clearly, just as the narration's insistent references to it highlight what an unreliable commodity time has become. In similar fashion the chronological confusions of the Hilly-Richard sequence, for instance, are exacerbated by Hilly's own temporal mistakes, which the narration corrects ('She was, of course, hopelessly wrong' (p.103)). Richard is at one point tellingly described as being, as he emerges from a flashback to his dead wife, 'Back in *his* present' (p.64, my emphasis). Given the instability of time throughout the text just whose present, Green asks us to consider, is true or valid at any given time - a theme which the parenthetical narrations of the Blitz explicitly raise later on. Involuntary memories, a preoccupation of the autobiography, are characteristic in *Caught*, aspects of the characters' helplessness in time (a point which Kurt Vonnegut, much later, would make in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, where 'Billy Pilgrim is spastic in time, has no control over where he is going next, and the trips aren't necessarily fun'¹⁰).

Unit #6, taking place 'one evening before the war' (p.51), provides another puzzling inconsistency. It analeptically introduces Piper at some point during the early days of auxiliary training, which began in September 1938. Piper runs into Hilly who in turn bumps into Richard: he, chatting to her, remarks that he cannot visualize what fires will be like. At this point the narrating agency intervenes with the proleptic assertion that 'He was not to know what real smoke was like for another eighteen months' (p.56). This prolepsis to March 1940 is puzzling: the date is irrelevant, and would only really make sense if it was actually March 1939 rather than September 1938 (thus forming another of the numerous prolepses to the Blitz). However, unit #7 specifically rules this out, continuing 'on a morning twelve months later. Just three weeks after mobilisation', which confirms that the previous unit is indeed set in September (p.57).

4.4.4 Textual anachronies

¹⁰ *Slaughterhouse-Five: Or the Children's Crusade, a Duty Dance with Death* (London: Cape, 1970), p.20.

Widespread anachronic sections (narrational prolepses, analeptic memories, sections or parentheses) further rupture linearity by destabilizing the present moment of narration. These all disrupt, unsettling narrative logic and creating a text which is in flux, and deliberately impeding the reader's orderly resolution of the narrative. Crucial events are repeatedly met in *Caught* out of textual position: Pye's death prematurely leaks out; the Blitz is repeatedly encountered in frustratingly short proleptic excerpts, then omitted altogether, and finally told via disturbingly contradictory analepses. Textual analepses modulate, in complicated fashion, between character-motivated recollections¹¹, analepses attributable to the narrating agency, and analeptic sections from characters' pasts which appear to be randomly produced by the narration. *Caught*'s two principal montage sequences, cutting sequentially between sub-station, restaurant and night-club, both enclose dissonant analeptic sections. Hilly and Richard out together on the evening of Day 3 (pp.98-105 in the restaurant, then 'later' at a night-club, pp.107-13) sandwiches two analeptic sequences, 'Only that morning' as Piper betrays Pye to Trant, and 'That very afternoon' as Pye tells one of the regulars that "'They're meeting to-night on their leave day'" (pp.105-6), a proleptic anticipation within an analeptic section of the framing scene. Day 5's more complicated collage (cutting between Richard and Hilly in bed/ Pye out with Prudence/ Mrs Howells giving Piper extra food, pp.116-32) similarly moves from notionally simultaneous events to events earlier that day, as 'that very afternoon' Piper continues to search for the right shade for Trant's bedroom, and back again to 'That very evening'.

Many of the character-motivated analepses are produced involuntarily, triggered by memories which drags Green's characters back into the past, 'before the war', that crucial destination for wartime memory. Richard compulsively recalls Christopher's kidnapping (things in the present ever leading him 'back to the abduction again' (p.31)). He also cannot forget his dead wife, finding himself unable to 'keep his hands off her in memory' or 'leave his wife's memory alone', helplessly drawn back to 'that early summer they had first met, the year he got to know her' (pp.33, 63). Pye has his own obsessions, his fatefully misremembered sexual encounters (pp.40-42,

¹¹ Or, as Genette puts it, 'subordinated to the remembering activity of the intermediary subject' (*Narrative Discourse*, p.45).

140-1), and his sister's role in the abduction. These obsessive mnemonic returns form another form of textual delay, just as elsewhere recollections pause the narrative to provide supplementary information (Richard's recollections of events in his childhood; training with the Fire Service; or the analeptic episode from Piper's home life sometime during this period). All of this is very Proustian (there is even a faint verbal echo in those names, Pye/Roe), of course, and Green makes sure that the senses, in this novel obsessed by extreme physical states and experiences, trigger these involuntary remembering states. However, as the text makes clear, the colossal chronological disruptions are never fixed to these remembering subjects: the destruction of clock time does not herald the triumph of subjective time, for the text's disruptions seem to possess an autonomous life of their own. This is very clear in the parenthetical analepses which recount the Blitz and the abduction: in these cases, as we have seen in section 3.4.2, Richard's initial mnemonic recalls are replaced and supplanted by troubling alternative versions. These expand and enlarge upon his consciously inadequate attempts to narrate, and in so doing effectively pause the text, replacing his short and halting attempts with long detailed versions.

Caught's reluctance to start *at the beginning*, in linear fashion, is matched by its inability to remain consistently on any given temporal level. No sooner has the novel begun, for instance, than the narrating agency is promising to tell, via a complex achrony, of the abduction 'as will appear' (p.10) - proleptically anticipating what is actually, at this point, an analeptic event, which then turns out to be external to the main textual narrative. The series of obsessive prolepses towards the future Blitz throughout the opening sections disrupt the text, usually with little warning: the Blitz, therefore, is a gravitational field inexorably dragging the text towards it. Unit #2 suddenly cuts without warning from Richard, giving Christopher a birthday present on his second period of leave, to a much later leave at the height of the Blitz:

The next day Richard gave a bike Dy had bought for him. Many months later, at the height of the first blitz, Roe could not remember how the child was given this present (p.25).

What Richard recalls has become unreliable: he finds, 'while he was being bombed on twenty-four hours' leave [...] his memory at fault'; and with this the text resumes, next paragraph, back on the boy's birthday, as if no prolepsis had occurred ('The boy

had been good all that day' (pp. 25, 26)). Several prolepses directly intervene to correct Richard's ignorance of future events during the Blitz. Out drinking during the first few days in the substation with Wal and Chopper a similar two-paragraph prolepsis mid-conversation to events 'Months afterwards, when the blitz began' states what fire is really like (p.48). Then, as Richard is assuring Hilly how the Regulars will do their jobs when the time comes, the text cuts to a longer account of a night raid, 'Almost twelve months to a day after this conversation', when Chopper proves him wrong (p.95). Again Green makes little attempt to hide the obtrusiveness of the narrative shift, and the text returns, quite clumsily, back to its original level, 'Twelve months almost to a day before such things happened every night' (p.98). The Blitz, in fact, holds such sway over the text that the slightest advance misconceptions are immediately corrected. When Christopher asks his father why fire engines are painted grey Richard fumbles the explanation, prompting the narration to intervene, stating 'Who was he to know, before he had been in a raid, that it would have been better to paint them pink' (p.149).

This creates a contradictory textual motion. Repeated narrative realignments and sections told out of order ensure that the 'narrative eventually moves forward, but with the utmost reluctance'¹², yet the internal prolepses within these sequences impatiently reach towards what, in a so-called 'Blitz novel', must be its logical climax, the Blitz itself. The present, judged by these incessant forays into past and future, is intolerable: *Caught*'s plot cannot be told from a stable present because such a position does not, in this destabilizing wartime environment, exist. And so Green's narration constantly reaches impatiently beyond itself, attempting to go faster, to access key events before their turn to be narrated arrives. It is therefore deliberately paradoxical that the Blitz, repeatedly glimpsed proleptically during units #1-13, should be elided when finally the time comes in the narrative to narrate it. The Blitz is a textual black hole, a hollow centre or historical vortex, perpetually drawing the narrative, helplessly "caught", towards it. Unit #13 ends in June 1940; when the narrative resumes in unit #14 it is November, and Richard, concussed during the Blitz, is on his way home on sick-leave. The Blitz, the obvious climax of the narrative, in this way completely disappears into a colossal textual gap. In a text

¹² Alan Munton, *English Fiction of the Second World War* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), p.44.

preoccupied with anticipating the Blitz its non-appearance at the correct narrative point in time is particularly startling. What the final unit does is narrate the Blitz through a series of problematic character-motivated analepses, as Richard tries to tell Dy one mid-November afternoon in the country about his experiences in London during the September 9th Blitz. It is altogether typical of *Caught*'s structure, which is propelled by these continuous movements back and forth between different moments in time, that we should thus only view the Blitz at secondary narrative levels.

Pye is the inadvertent subject of many prolepses which, like the text's remorseless historical parallelism, emphasize how "caught" he is by malign circumstance (indeed, Pye rightly dreads the future 'state of things' (p.133)). Richard fails to see the dangers of Piper and Prudence to Pye, and is on both counts proleptically corrected: he dismisses Piper as an ineffectual old bore ('How utterly harmless you are, thought Richard, sleepless, and how wrong he was' (p.42)); and he is equally mistaken when he assumes that neither Prudence nor Ilse are sexually available, or that Pye and Shiner would stand a chance with them ('in this he was wrong, both times' (p.66)). This method is extended to the other main agents of his downfall: when Pye agrees to give Mary the job of cook on Piper's recommendation, the text notes, 'Later on he carried out his promise. He was to regret it' (p.47); Mary herself is described, cryptically, as being 'very nervous, almost prophetically so, as it turned out' of the boiler (p.59)¹³. The first account of Pye's fate is, appropriately enough, premature, and revealed in typically complicated fashion through what Genette terms a *double achrony*. Within one of the text's proleptic Blitz accounts (pp.95-98) Richard analeptically wonders in the confusion whether

one of these bombs they rained down each night on London would turn [Pye] out of the cover he had taken, willy nilly, in his coffin, eaten by worms six foot underground (p.97).

In similar fashion the text reveals the circumstances of his death in another double achrony, this time a secondary analepsis within Richard's analeptic account of the Blitz. Switching from his memories of the night of the first Blitz he tells Dy how:

¹³ And such malign coincidences appeal to Green: in *Living* a station lavatory attendant retrieves Bert's discarded bouquet at the start of the elopement, joking that "Maybe, again, you'll forget 'erself'", which is, as the narration wryly hints, 'turning prophetic' (p.214).

we were suddenly face to face with it, *as I was with Pye two months before* when I pulled him out of the gas oven (p.183, my italics).

The inevitability of Pye's death after page ninety-seven's prolepsis colours all subsequent references. His error of judgement over Mary's absence coincides with disintegration of his relationship with Prudence, and the narrative hints how 'bed was all they had, and were not to have much longer in common' (p.119). As 'the peril' draws 'closer and heavier about Pye' (p.122), such proleptic hints become more and more frequent: the official reprimand for Mary going adrift is darkly intimated to be 'the beginning of the end'), and Pye justly fears disaster, that 'he was going to come on it any minute round the corner' - 'as he was', the narration helpfully adds (p.132).

4.4.5 Overlaps and duplication

Double achronies, like the account of Pye's death and suicide discussed above, are an inevitable feature of *Caught's* structural complications. The text produces complicated double structures; recalls that are anticipations, and vice-versa. Heading back to London on the night train in unit #1, Richard recalls the events of the abduction, said to have taken place 'some months earlier, *as will appear*' (p.10, my emphasis). In this fashion Green's narrative therefore signposts its own problems with linearity, creating a premature prolepsis to an analeptic event which is in turn yet to be narrated in the text. Later, in equally entangled fashion, the text compares Pye, lying on his bed thinking of the past (unit #9) to Richard, in this opening scene, similarly preoccupied (Pye groans 'as Richard would, full length on the railway carriage seat coming back from his first leave, in six weeks' time' (p.85)). The comparison manages to be simultaneously proleptic, recording a future event *at this point* in the narrative, as well as analeptic, since through the peculiarities of structure it functions as a narrative recall of an event already narrated. Unit #7, describing Richard's life during the opening weeks of September, explains how Christopher has been sent to the country, and how he only gets to see him when the duty-rosters allow him 'work ninety-six hours to get forty-eight hours off, a practice that was not begun well into November' (p.63). The effect is exactly the same, since these details

duplicate what we already have learnt much earlier. The non-linear opening units, therefore, compete and interfere with the main narrative time-scale, just as the text's obsessive prolepses and analepses reach backwards and forwards confusing the unfolding of the plot and, with the proleptic advances towards the Blitz, threaten to pre-empt the climax of the narrative by prematurely revealing the story. There are similar problems with the analeptic sections, which have their own awkward chronologies. Unit #3 contains a series of analeptic accounts starting with Richard's pre-war training, when he 'first joined the service' (September 1938, p.27); to the end of training (December); and finally the nine months of reserve duty between December 1938 and August 1939. This narrative then extends to the general mobilisation, as Richard is 'called up three days before the outbreak' (31 August 1939, p.28). At this point the unit then advances in a few sentences first to catch up with unit #1 ('when there were no raids, [...] he forgot Christopher until [...] his first leave'); before fast-forwarding to the Blitz, 'A year later, when raids began'. In this fashion this initially analeptic section moves iteratively well into the future, to a temporal point which exceeds its textual position, prompting the narrating agency apologetically to return to the unit's principal narrative level: 'But while being trained, *that is before* the war' (p.28, my emphasis). The text contains several similarly clumsy temporal reorientations. During the early days in the sub-station Richard, told off for failing to keep his bed tidy, does not 'feel the backlash for several days', and is then obliged to buy 'his way back' into favour. This drift into the future, however, is suddenly checked by the narration, which then returns the reader returning to the original temporal level: '*Before* he managed, however' (p.92, my emphasis). Green carefully emphasizes this awkwardness just moments later, again moving into the future ('Not many days later') as Richard asks Hilly to put in a good word for him before returning the text once more, 'But at this moment' (p.92).

4.5 ORDER AND INSTABILITY IN *PARTY GOING, LOVING, BACK AND CONCLUDING*

4.5.1 Interpenetrating time-structures in *Party Going*

After the complexities of *Living*, *Party Going* appears relatively unproblematic: in two hundred and forty-eight pages it details in nineteen unmarked units¹⁴ a few hours early one evening. This offers unusual mimetic possibilities of correspondence, since story-time and narrational-time are for once relatively similar, and prolepses or analepses to events outside the text's time frame are restricted to the odd narrational assertion or digression¹⁵. It is therefore surprising, given this extremely simple time scale, to discover how erratic the narrative's handling of time and structure is. Certain units prove, under closer analysis, to be parallel rather than consecutive, and in some time seems to pause. Unit #3 is a logical continuation of unit #2, but the station clock remains at half-past four in both (pp.14-19 and 20-30)¹⁶. The opening four sections cut between a series of events in the station and various of the party-goers, making their way there, finally converging on page thirty-five, when it is announced that, with most of the novel's characters now assembled 'all in one place', the novel can finally get going. Of course, in a text preoccupied with *not* getting anywhere, it is only natural that this triumph is, yet again, momentary, and this temporary synchronization is broken up by fresh questions of chronology and order.

Although there are only two significant events in the text (the crowd's response when it becomes clear the station is fog-bound; and its reaction to the departures board starting to alter, signifying the fog is lifting), both are complicated by contradicting narrative versions. The crowd begin chanting "WE WANT TRAINS" (p.99); before, sometime later, producing an impromptu community sing-along (pp.151-52). But this order of events in this sequence is not what the narrative later offers:

¹⁴ #1, pp.7-13; #2, pp.14-20; #3, pp.21-31; #4, pp.32-39; #5, pp.40-54; #6, pp.55-69; #7, pp.70-77; #8, pp.78-88; #9, pp.89-107; #10, pp.108-21; #11, pp.122-32; #12, pp.133-49; #13, pp.150-57; #14, pp.158-78; #15, pp.179-98; #16, pp.199-214; #17, pp.215-28; #18, pp.229-48; #19, pp.249-55

¹⁵ The only significant analepsis is, for example, to the Tommy Tucker incident, 'once before another fog' (p.100).

¹⁶ This is a deliberate effect: the church clock in *Blindness*, for instance, reliably chimes the hours (pp.97-143) and therefore has a purely *linear* temporal function.

they had tried singing [...] but this feeling did not last and soon they did not agree about songs [...] Then no one sang at all [...] Then one section had begun to chant “we want our train” over and over again and at first everyone had laughed and joined in and then had failed, there were no trains. And so, having tried everything, desolation overtook them (pp.200-1).

In the second version the order of singing and chanting is oddly reversed, and the words of the chant are subtly altered. Nor is any mention made of the ‘faint sound of cheering’ earlier reported (p.45). The discrepancy may be slight, but it is unsettling (as its more radical formulation, the competing versions of *Caught*’s prolepses, indeed confirm). Similar disorientations recur throughout the text, particularly between units #16 and #18, which offer puzzlingly contradictory repetitions and duplications. First of all, as Thomson, Edwards and the ‘mystery man’ talk in the station forecourt, we learn that ‘a huge wild roar broke from the crowd. They were beginning to adjust that board indicating times of trains’ (p.205). The next section, featuring Max and Amabel in one of the hotel rooms up above, which seems initially to follow on, is revealed to be analeptic when, after arguing, Amabel falls asleep, to be woken some time later by this same roar. This duplication is carefully emphasized by simply amending the earlier sentence by adding an additional word (‘a huge wild roar broke from the crowd *outside*. They were beginning to adjust that board indicating times of trains’ (p.227, my emphasis)). Max then decides to go downstairs (p.228). Unit #18 then resumes, again analeptically, to some point parallel to or prior to section sixteen, describing how Alex ‘had been left alone again with Miss Crevy when Amabel had changed into her fur coat to wait for Max to take him off upstairs’ (p.229). The deliberate awkwardness of the integration is interesting: Green’s frictions between overlapping units offer no immediate benefit, other than the pleasure of non-linearity. They subtly undermine the relationship between narrational time and story time. Not until page 241, therefore, does section eighteen resynchronize with the end-point of the previous unit (p.229), as Max finally enters the room (‘at this moment [...] Max came in’). Moreover, a few pages earlier, Julia imagines that the crowd have broken in (p.234), misinterpreting the ‘huge roar’, which has now been mentioned three times in the text. Similarly disorientating repetitions will be heard in *Concluding*, which indeed opens and closes with mysterious cries echoing in triplicate. In fact, iterative sections or repeating incidents are characteristic elements of Green’s narratives, which often prefer to provide

various versions of events at different points in the text rather than simply sticking to one account. *Living* is particularly rich in incidences of frequentative narration: versions of Tupe's fall, for instance, are given by Joe, first at the foundry, and then to Albert the shopkeeper, and then twice by Tupe himself (to Bridges and Bert). Or there is the incident of the parted wire-rope, described by Joe in (5:1); then discussed by Bert, Lil and Jim in (5:2), then by Tupe and one of his cronies in (5:6); before resurfacing again in Dick's letter (7:14); and finally argued over by Bridges and Tupe in (8:4). Such repetitions also anticipate the formal polyphonic structures of *Nothing* and *Doting*, in which movements, conversations, phrases and structural groupings repeat at length.

The irregular chronological placement of sections which, instead of advancing the text in linear fashion are revealed to be either parallel, analeptic, or proleptic, deliberately tests the reader's concentration. Green's texts are fond of cutting from one scene to another, which appears initially straightforward, before cutting back to the original scene, proving the intervening scene to be analeptic or inserted out of place in the text. In *Party Going*, having left Max and Julia talking in section nine (p.114), the text apparently advances through a variety of scenes and encounters, yet when the narrative resumes with them, thirty-six pages later in section thirteen, they have in the meantime only just 'come to an end of talk and speeches'. Or there is the pause between units #11 and #12. The former concludes as Angela grabs hold of 'one finger of [Robin's] sweating hand' (p.132); unit #12 then begins with a digression concerning various aspects of Amabel's lifestyle, before cutting back to Robin and Angela, stating: 'While [Amabel] was on her way Angela, still holding on to his finger, had told Adams...' (p.136). The 'Amabel' sequence represents an unspecified analepsis, a secondary sequence which pauses a narrative frozen in mid-gesture. There is a similar marked pause in *Concluding*, where the thirteenth unit (pp.75-81) ends with Marchbanks walking 'straight out' of the Sanctum into the corridor. The next narrative unit, which is undated, describes Moira's visit to Rock's cottage (pp.81-87), before the text returns, in the fifteenth unit, to exactly where unit thirteen had ended, with Baker speaking 'as Marchbanks left the room' (p.88). The 'Souvenir' in *Back*, of course, represents the most extreme form of textual pause in the fiction.

In *Party Going*, as in *Living*, Green's handling of textual articulations of time is indebted to filmic observation, displaying a quasi-cinematic 'ability to fuse disparate fragments in space and time into a sense of simultaneity' (Holmesland, p.9). Green himself suggested that cinema had shown the writer how 'substance and depth' might best be obtained, by 'superimposing' and 'telescoping' scenes together ('ANR', p.145). Throughout his texts Green's narrating agencies make clever pseudo-cinematic continuity cuts, linking separate groups of characters. They dramatically cut between tenuously connected or entirely coincidental events, jumbling things obviously related and things practically unrelated indiscriminately together. So *Living* uses dialogue hooks to link scenes, cross-cutting from Aaron and Bentley, arguing about the lavatory 'outrage', to Joe Gates, 'saying as much to Mr Craigan in iron foundry shop' (pp.28-29). Elsewhere the same technique is employed to make non-verbal comparisons, as the text suddenly cuts away from Jim in the cinema (unable to see Lily is 'all dreams'), to Craigan at home ('But Mr Craigan saw this...'), before returning to the auditorium (p.161). Spatial cutting is ingenious and motivational, and the analogies justify the construction. Throughout Lily's journey to Liverpool (pp.217-23) the text cuts and contrasts details of the elopement with her life back home, particularly Craigan as he thinks about her. Lily tells Berts, "'Why look it's raining'"; the next paragraph empathetically cuts back to Birmingham ('It was raining - it's coming on to rain decided Mr Craigan' (p.206)).

Party Going's paragraph links are just as obsessional. Having noted Miss Fellowes finally having 'some rest', the text cuts next paragraph to observe that 'But there was nothing of that kind for Mr Adams' (p.126). Or from Thomson, feeling sorry for himself by Julia's luggage, to his mistress: "'Poor Thomson," Julia said just then' (p.161). The two servants, talking about Miss Fellowes, finally lose interest in the topic ('Anyway they both of them dropped it'): cutting away from them, however, we learn that others are still preoccupied with it ('But this was what Claire was talking about with Evelyn' (p.207)). And so on:

[Alex] found it bewildering. > So did Mr Hignam, pushing his way through crowds (p.46);

[Angela] began to tremble from her toes up. > And Amabel was just drying hers on a towel (p.171).

Alex, arguing with Angela and Max as to whether the mystery man is the hotel detective, wearily concludes, “I thought he might be, but I shouldn’t think so”; this is immediately picked up, for the narration observes, effectively answering Alex, that ‘He could not have been [...] no one in authority seemed to know him’ (p.174). No sooner does Alex, seeing Angela for the first time, ask “‘who’s the individual with her?’”, than the text helpfully explains: ‘The individual with Miss Angela Crevy was her young man’ (p.43). Robert has only to wonder ‘what the others were doing’ (p.123), for the narrative to cut, first to Claire and Evy on the telephone ‘in the room outside’, and then to Robin arguing with Angela (p.126). Julia, thinking about Miss Fellowes, makes Max ‘swear he would not tell another soul because of Claire’; the text accordingly cuts to her, as if checking up on her whereabouts (‘And now Claire...’ (p.60)). This is repeated in turn when her Auntie May needs bringing up to date (‘As for Miss Fellowes...’ (p.72)). *Caught* offers an exemplary montage, splicing one scene with Pye telling a crony how he had told Roe to “‘put that fag out” (“What does ‘e do? The miserable so an’ so stubs it on the coachwork”)), with another featuring Richard in a night club, squashing ‘his cigarette out on a large china fig leaf’ (p.107).

The fiction is full of such connections. Green’s novels repeatedly refer to similar things happening ‘at this moment’ in separate locations, a phrase which recurs with a wide number of variations throughout his texts¹⁷. The fiction has its own version of cinematic split-screen (Evelyn and Claire, on separate telephones), as well as a couple of classic montage sequences, most notably the bravura ten page collage of notionally parallel scenes in five separate locations, all happening ‘at that instant’ which starts and ends in *Caught*’s substation (pp.116-126)¹⁸.

¹⁷ cf. ‘at this precise moment’; ‘at this time/ instant’ (*Li*, p.231, *PG*, pp.10, 15; *Lo*, pp.65, 91, 146; *Co*, pp. 7, 124, 127, 139, 150, 186); or ‘just then’ (*Li*, pp.23, 210).

¹⁸ p.116: Mary Howells gives Piper a ‘little extra’ in the kitchen (including a single paragraph cut, ‘at that instant’ (p117), to Richard in bed with Hilly; p.118: Richard in bed with Hilly, part 2/ then Pye entertaining Prudence in, coincidentally, ‘that nightclub Richard had taken Hilly’; p.119: Richard still with Hilly, part 3 (a couple of paragraphs); p.120: ‘at that instant’ Brid, having arrived back home/ then Pye telling Prudence a story in the nightclub; p.122: (a brief analepsis to ‘that very afternoon’); p.123: a grand resumé of the entire montage sequence as it currently stands: ‘That very evening, as Richard was still enjoying Hilly [...] with Pye still waiting for Prudence to drink up her third “white lady”, the Chief Superintendent, Mr. Dodge, was talking to his District Officer, Trant’; p.124: Finally, again at ‘that instant’, the auxiliaries, arguing in the substation.

When not cutting to things happening at the exact time elsewhere, Green's narrating agencies tend to record events occurring 'meantime'¹⁹, a more equivocal temporal designation. This designates three different types of cuts: to analeptic sequences which simply fill in textual gaps; or to ones which, overlapping with the main narrative, create temporal contradictions; and as a form of narrative shorthand designating cuts of an indeterminate nature, neither necessarily analeptic nor simultaneous. What is important is the extent to which narrative cutting is justified by temporal connection, so that textual assembly invariably follows the principle that nothing happens in isolation.

Keeping textual units balanced against each other is, therefore, an important element of Green's constructional strategies, and can be related to what we have so far seen of his fondness for keeping meaning suspended and relational. When connections are on offer in his novels they tend to appear obsessional (apparently motivated by obscure narrational agendas), or simply offer illusory patterns. Few of the things happening at the same time have any real relation to each other which is anything more than coincidental. *Nothing* and *Doting*, as sections 5.3.3 to 5.3.5 will extensively demonstrate, clearly illustrate Green's sense of constructional balance: while there are no obvious temporal connections between scenes, each nevertheless forms part of a careful composition of structural interconnections.

4.5.2 'Dramatic time' in *Loving*

Conflicting time scales in Green's fiction are always deliberate, typically disrupting otherwise unproblematic linear narratives. This is particularly marked in *Loving*, despite the fact that for most of the text the point is that chronology, in this landlocked enclosure, is irrelevant. Nothing happens in Kinalty, and the indeterminate time-formulae in the text accordingly reflect this: barring one crucial sequence, all of the novel's eleven units are only vaguely distinguished in time from one another, much as the opening "once upon a day" formula implies. The first (pp.5-

¹⁹ See *Ca*, pp.78, 128, 163; *Lo*, pp.8, 71, 89, 111, 148, 173; *Ba*, pp. 86, 91; *Co*, pp.58, 110, 147; *Living* still uses more conventional diction, observing scenes 'meanwhile' - pp.172 [twice], 194).

29) a four day period following the opening declaration, the second 'Another morning' (pp.30-41); from here to one morning then afternoon on the 'first afternoon of spring' (pp.42-64); a Saturday in May, 'a few days later' (pp.64-75); the evening of May 18th and the next day (pp.75-94); a Thursday 'some days later' (pp.95-119); a two day sequence starting 'a few days later' (pp.119-56); a morning after 'a few days passed' (pp.157-92) then over the period of a week; 'one afternoon' sometime later (pp.192-202); 'some days later' (pp.202-14), and finally, once more, 'A few days afterwards' culminating in the elopement the following day (pp.202-29). There is little in these repetitive, consciously iterative formulae which suggests that there could possibly be any degree of confusion; yet between pages ninety-five and one hundred and sixty-one, mirroring *Caught*, Green again generates significant dissonance between one fixed chronological sequence, and the text's otherwise typically indeterminate chronology. One Thursday morning two telegrams from the Tennants arrive, while in the afternoon Charley disposes of the rotting peacock's corpse. After a gap the text resumes 'a few days later' (p.118) - eliding the discovery of the carcass in Mrs Welch's larder in the meantime - and on this afternoon the servants go for their picnic by the beach. However, in the first of the discrepancies, this day is directly identified as the Friday, which clashes with the 'few days' already mentioned. The text then advances to the 'next afternoon' (p.141) to relate the visit of the insurance investigator, followed by Edith's attempts to persuade Moira to return the stolen ring. After an announced gap ('A few days passed. Then one morning'), Charley then reports Mike's visit to the massed servants. But he claims, oddly, that this happened "not more than five days ago". "I've not said a word", he adds, "I thought I'll keep it to meself" (p.157). Charley's inability to hold his tongue, especially so given his astonishing over-reaction to Mike's "I. R. A." calling card, makes such a delay positively unbelievable (Edith, in the background, indeed protests at his version). This same morning they also learn that Mrs Tennant will now be returning on the Monday. When she gets back Charley tells her that "we had an unwelcome visitor on the Saturday" (p.170), implying that the visit occurred just the two days previously. This version of events is confirmed shortly afterwards, as Charley reprimands Edith for failing to retrieve the stolen ring, telling her that "there's nothing come of your method these last two days" (p.173). Thus the

narrational indeterminacy of 'a few days', or Charley's 'five days' both actually signify what is only the *next day*, Sunday, in a sequence that manages therefore to be at once continuous and also stretched out in time. It is alternately concentrated for dramatic tension, or elongated to suit the overall theme of indeterminacy, in much the same way that Green, in *Caught*, alternately stretches and warps time for dramatic purposes.

4.5.3 Multiple overlapping focalization in *Back*

Green employs a similarly indeterminate chronological structure in *Back*, once again deploying a temporally specific sequence (unit #16, narrating a long weekend in August at James' house in the country, pp.122-39) to typically chaotic effect. The strategy is, however, different: instead of using contradictory time-scales, Green instead splits the narrative's account of the weekend's events into a series of multiple overlapping and temporally duplicating narratives. As the text is otherwise consistently focalized by Charley, this change in strategy is doubly effective. The evening of their arrival is instead focalized by Dot, as she first flirts with James then waits in vain for Charley to come to her room (while the men distantly talk in the kitchen). Still in her account the text advances to the second day, culminating in James' visit to her bedroom:

The next day they'd done this, that, and the other, all very pleasant to be sure, but nothing in particular [...] But, by the second evening, she'd made up her mind there was nothing to it, nothing whatever [...] and she was just dropping off when the door did open a crack... (pp.124-25).

Dot's thoughts then analeptically drift back to the previous night (the 'very first evening, *when* Charley did not come, *while* she lay in bed' (p.125, my emphases). The text then analeptically returns to Charley, back to that evening (pointedly, on 'this first night'), and reveals precisely why he had not made a pass at her ('To tell the truth, he had forgotten that she existed' (p.125)). In a further duplication, the text then records Charley and James' conversation which Dot had earlier faintly heard from upstairs. Back on the morning of Day 2 for the second time, however, the

narrative cuts from Charley as focalizer to Dot, also on the 'next day, the first morning of her visit'; and then, next sentence, confusingly fast-forwards the narrative to resume at the point her previous account had stopped ('But the following day' [ie, Day 3]). The text then restores the original temporal level, as her thoughts drift back to the second day ('But the first morning they had an egg for breakfast each, which made up for a good deal' (p.132)), before resuming in the next paragraph with Charley's focalization once more. His version starts where hers has just stopped, pointedly repeating how the text is back on 'this first morning' (p.133). He teases Dot, who is said to be 'not in the least put out' by the night's rebuff - an observation promptly qualified by the proleptic observation that 'what was to happen had not occurred yet' because, as it is reiterated yet again, it is 'still the first morning' (p.133). In a similar mixed prolepsis a few pages later the narrating agency reminds the reader, as James talks to Dot about Charley over lunch, that 'of course she had no earthly notion of what was to happen, or that it was to be so soon' (p.135). The third narrational prolepsis occurs as some buzz bombs fly over at teatime, which prompts a thematic cut to the third day of the weekend ('How different the second morning, bed plus one day, when the same phenomenon occurred'), linked together apparently because on 'neither of these occasions did Charley move' (p.135). The text then switches temporal level and resumes with Charley focalizing the text on Day 3 ('that same second afternoon' (p.135)), and disorientatingly re-narrates the 'second lot of flying bombs', which, the text clumsily notes, 'has already been described' (p.138).

What are we to make of all this? As in *Caught* logical or consistent chronology has collapsed, although here the temporal movements and repeated switches of narrative level are bizarrely inexplicable. Indeed, Green carefully draws attention to the sheer messiness of his narrative structure, with its absurdly convoluted temporal references and awkward overlapping prolepses. Even the time references are absurd: 'bed plus one day' and 'the morrow, bed plus two day', or all this incessant talk of which morning or day it actually is at any given point.

What the sequence most closely resembles is a collage, randomly scrambling together separate narratives. Textual *assemblage*, of course, is a recurrent theme in the fiction, which contains a variety of different versions of this (*Blindness*, *Back* and *Party Going*'s use of allegedly archival documentation; the irregularly-assembled

chapters of *Caught*; the excerpted and reassembled documents in *Back* and *Doting*; Green's own literary cut-and-paste experiments on word order and language).

Also of note is the triptych structure which the 'Souvenir' creates in *Back* (pp.92-104), since this particular structural form is curiously influential in Green's work. It recurs in *Concluding*, divided into three clear main sections divided by blank pages of text (pp.108, 179); or in *Nothing*, similarly divided by blank pages (pp.81, 160) heralding new sections, each ritually starting in the characters' favourite hotel.

4.5.4 Anachronic effects in the fiction

We have examined the more significant anachronic effects in the fiction, particularly the major analepses or prolepses which directly affect textual order, and some conclusions can now be drawn regarding Green's use of anachrony. Analepses are usually tied to acts of remembering by his characters, which we shall not concern ourselves with; and, with the exception of the examples so far cited, narrational analepses, or cuts to events beyond the main textual frames of the novels, are rare, particularly in the later fiction. This is rather characteristic of Green's fiction, since he typically resists supplying background detail on characters, even when that means withholding significant information about their pasts. Pre-textual episodes, except those supplied by the characters themselves, are rarely included (key events like Charley's prison-camp experiences, details of Liz's breakdown, or the disappearance of Mary, remain frustratingly elusive). Prolepses, on the other hand, are altogether more interesting, since their use, unlike that of analepses, can only be exercised by the narrating function. And it is surprising both to the intermittent extent to which Green's otherwise discreet narratives employ this somewhat self-consciously obtrusive technique, and the effects they have on the texts. These take a variety of forms: predictive narrations, prophesying future events (like the repeated and unverified textual assertion that Kinalty is 'the most celebrated eighteenth-century folly in Eire that had still to be burned down' (*Lo*, p.203)); an aspect of narrative impatience (markedly in *Caught*, where internal prolepses repeatedly threaten to reveal things prematurely); and actual cuts to future events external to the text

(ironically poised, given the curious authority wielded by Green's narrating agencies, somewhere between clear evidence of the 'life beyond the text' that Green desired, and examples of the conjectural nature of all narratorial commentary).

Internal prolepses in Green's fiction are typically used to tease the reader by offering potential outcomes which may or may not come true. *Caught*'s prolepses suggest a restlessness with the linear demands of narration; elsewhere in the fiction they fleetingly appear, threatening to give the game away. Some intimate a sort of self-conscious, 'narratorial' impatience, generating reflexive, metafictional references to the process of narration. *Party Going*'s narrator, discussing Amabel's influence over Max, assures that, 'as we shall see' (p.134), this will be properly demonstrated; while Paddy in *Loving* is described as Kate and Edie's 'sport and to one of them he was even more than that' (p.16). In similar fashion the narrating agency drops hints about Charley in *Back*, alluding to the future outcome of the story: when he collapses asleep in the park, after his first series of attacks, we are told that it 'was the last good sleep he was to have for some time' (p.61), while after reading the inserted text 'which seemed so close to Charley's situation' he sleeps better - the *Souvenir* being itself, of course, a covert dumb-show which threatens to reveal the outcome of the text prematurely. *Concluding*'s narration plays with expectations of mysteries (a central habit in the fiction and one which will be discussed in section 5.2.6), referring to those two-thirds of the students who know 'nothing whatever, at first' (p.20), or to the mysterious plot in which 'what had begun [...] is yet to be concealed' (p.109).

External prolepses refer to positions beyond the texts, and in Green's fiction are divided between the iterative and the specific. The former lack precision and could well be seen as being conjectural: *Living* switches from Dick Dupret's disapproval of the stratagems employed to rouse his father to note that 'for the rest of his life he spoke with venom of doctors' (p.93); *Loving* assures the reader that Raunce and Edith 'were married and lived happily ever after' (p.229); in *Back* Charley and Nancy, sleeping together for the first time, elicits the confident assertion that this is 'the first time in what was to be a happy married life' (p.208). Similarly we learn, when Rock puts his hand into Ted's kennel to check up on his goose, that 'he would never, for the rest of his days, be able to explain why' (*Co*, p.253). While they apparently refer beyond the text, these observations are so vague and formulaic that

they carry little sense of certainty. Much more interesting, however, are the sudden advances into future positions. These are always retroactive interpretations, re-evaluations supplied by narrating agencies which step into characters' futures and substitute their future reactions, with hindsight, for those of the present (this technique can be compared to those Blitz parentheses, which also usurp narrational level in interesting fashion). This is particularly the case in *Caught*, where advances to future events are indeed commonplace, as it is repeatedly noted how Richard 'learned afterwards', Piper 'said afterwards' (pp.79, 83), or Pye 'was to remember afterwards' (p.137). Amidst the great retrospective Blitz narrative at the end the sequence's reach is further complicated when the narrative suddenly leaps into the future to Richard's state of mind a year later:

Even when, twelve months later, he had begun to forget raids [...] even then he found he could not go back to his old daydreams about this place (p.178).

What is interesting about these narrative deviations is their unpredictability, their redundancy (all substitute accounts characteristically concern matters which are deeply unimportant). In the closing scenes of *Back Charley* and Nancy come across Ridley by accident, yet Charley's reaction comes *at a later date*, from a vantage-point beyond the text's boundaries ('Afterwards, when Charley went over it in his mind' (p.207)). The scene then returns to the original narrative level. Green does this again in *Concluding* - perhaps rebelling against the obvious dramatic restrictions of its single day scope - when the text cuts from Rock, asked by Moira to go downstairs, to his considered opinion of the episode, 'a day later' (p.203), and then back, mid-dialogue, to his actual response ("Wait," he said'). Green's narrating agencies fleetingly reveal characters' futures, referring to areas outside the text, although in typical fashion this level of authority is fleeting, and all these examples provide trivial detail, whereas elsewhere significant outcomes are characteristically withheld - a play upon levels of access and textual authority typical of the fiction.

5 *NOTHING, DOTING, “SEEMING”*: TOWARDS THE *NOUVEAU ROMAN*

5.1 INTRODUCTION: THE METHODOLOGICAL SHIFT

In 1948, at the age of 43, Green published his seventh novel, *Concluding*. Between this and his subsequent two novels, *Nothing* (1950) and *Doting* (1952), his approach to fiction significantly altered. Prior to 1950 Green's fiction is stylistically inconsistent, restlessly alternating between, as Gibson puts it, 'idioms that are opposed extremes' (*RND*, p.124). No two texts are alike: an essential element of the unstable vision, hitherto, is its diversity. The final two novels, on the other hand, are very similar. Not only has the idiom stabilized, but Green also displays for the first time a willingness to engage his public, offering a series of explanations for the theoretical change of heart which the final novels represent. Whereas before only *Pack My Bag* (1940) and the 'Apologia' (1941) touch on questions of representation (and far from expansively at that), the 1950s would see Green complete several theoretical articles: two open letters ('A Novelist to His Readers I and II') and a broadcast ('For John Lehmann's Programme'); an essay on the future of the novel; and a string of interviews. Both theory and fiction champion a progressively abstract representational approach, the former statements accompanying and explaining the final fiction's methodological shift in direction.

Few of Green's critics have much liked the final novels. They have attracted considerably less attention than his earlier work, either dismissed as sterile exercises in self-limitation, or regarded as betrayals of the earlier style, even though the new extremes represent less a form of creative apostasy than the logical corollary of Green's experimentation with established forms and techniques. Their case is hardly helped, moreover, by the fact that Green's accompanying theories do contain, as Gibson suggests (he was 'not a very clear theoretician'¹), some quite obvious flaws.

Yet, despite these objections, the unstable vision finally establishes in *Nothing* and

¹ 'Henry Green as Experimental Novelist', *Studies in the Novel* 16 (1984), pp.197-214 (210).

Doting what Green's disconnective strategies, liberties taken with language, scepticism of representation and authority all desire. *Nothing* and *Doting* represent effectively the culmination of Green's experimental career, which he himself had come to see, around the time of writing *Nothing*, as 'an advanced attempt to break up the old-fashioned type of novel' ('DL', p.84). Green's final novels advance towards abstract ideals which strip the novel towards that desirable 'absolute minimum'. His sense of conscious experimentation is incontrovertible, and years later Green would still stick to his experimental credentials. Agreeing with David Lambourne's suggestion that he was a writer 'altering the form of the novel' to make a 'personal statement', he maintained that he would still 'call myself an experimental novelist' ('NTH', pp.67-68). Although the final novels indeed proved to be 'end-games' for Green, who lapsed as a novelist into a famously protracted silence until his death, twenty-one years after *Doting*, his failure nevertheless anticipates a new way forward. *Nothing* and *Doting*, this chapter argues, despite their apparent sterility for Green, are significant not only as the culmination of his experiments with the novel form, but also because their abstract idioms offer distinct parallels and correspondences with new and challenging developments in fiction in France, subsequently baptised the 'nouveau roman' movement.

The ways in which *Nothing* and *Doting* anticipate and parallel the French 'new novel' therefore form the basis of this chapter, which sets out to examine the various convergences and similarities between them. After briefly contextualizing Green's work within the mid-century context, we shall start with a comparison of their respective theoretical declarations and hopes for the future novel. I then propose to consider the ways in which *Nothing* and *Doting* approach the new novel, comparing and contrasting Green's representation of character, attitude to description, dialogue, space, structure, and hermeneutic concerns with the similarly-minded constructions found in the *nouveau roman*. Abstracted down to the rigidities of formal parallelism and structural geometries, the unstable vision progresses towards a constraining rigour which represents, paradoxically, simultaneously the culmination of Green's unstable strategies, and a way of controlling and containing that instability within the formal perfection of abstraction.

Through this analysis I hope firstly to reassess the importance of Green's final novels by showing how they represent the culmination of the unstable vision; and

secondly, to argue that they mark a valuable point of transition between a distinctly modernist sense of epistemological doubt, and the postmodern ontological despair represented by the *nouveau roman*, a direction unique in Britain at this time. Finally, the last section sets Green's eventual abandoning of the novel into context, contrasting it to other ways of approaching the void, and assessing the final impact of the unstable vision on Green as an artist.

5.2 CONNECTIONS WITH THE *NOUVEAU ROMAN*

5.2.1 Mid-century contexts

The term 'nouveau roman', it should be pointed out, is a somewhat loose and programmatic classification, a useful umbrella which covers a diverse group of post-war novelists in France who began writing novels and theoretical treatises during the early 1950s, starting around the same point that Henry Green was writing his final two novels. John Calder's definition of this 'movement' is useful, and points towards the ways in which the work of the writers under its banner may be compared and contrasted with Green's final novels. He calls them highly

disparate writers, sharing a dissatisfaction with the accepted novel form, which seemed to them inadequate to express the state of the world and their own preoccupations, particularly in regard to truth and observation, each writing in isolation around 1950, becoming recognised and merged together as a group under a variety of epithets (their novels were referred to as the anti-novel, a-novel, *chosism*)².

The three principal exponents of the 'new novel' - Michel Butor, Alain Robbe-Grillet, and Nathalie Sarraute - share, despite widely differing operating tactics, a common determination to seek out new forms for the novel. They cast a highly suspicious eye on the nature of fiction, bringing a stimulating critical self-

² Introduction to *The Nouveau Roman Reader*, ed. by John Calder and John Fletcher (London: Calder, 1986), p.30. In 1961, almost ten years later, Roland Barthes could write: 'One may well hesitate to see the "new novel" as anything but a sociological phenomenon, a literary myth [...]; a community of friendships, of publishers, and of panel discussions does not suffice to sanction a general synthesis of works'. ('Literature Today: Answers to a Questionnaire in *Tel Quel*', in *Critical Essays*, trans. by Richard Howard (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972), pp. 151-161 (161)).

consciousness to the nature of representation in the novel, and the status of character, language, and plot - what Calder, in his introduction, calls an ostentatious 'preoccupation with forms and structure, taking up again, after an interval, the aesthetic obsessions of earlier modernist writers' (*Nouveau Roman Reader*, p.9). The shared modernist heritage is a significant point of contact between Green's novels of the 1950s and those of the *nouveaux romanciers*. Robbe-Grillet, for example, felt that he was building upon the achievements of modernist writers, his work thus more a continuation of modernist experimentation than a rejection of present forms of fiction:

Flaubert, Dostoyevsky, Proust, Kafka, Joyce, Faulkner, Beckett ... Far from making a clean sweep of the past, it is on the names of our predecessors that we find it easiest to agree, and our only ambition is to continue where they left off³.

The same names crop up in Green's own theoretical writings. Green likens the giants of early twentieth century fiction to 'cats which have licked the plate clean. You've got to dream up another dish if you're to be a writer' ('AF', p.254). This need to 'dream up another dish' is directly reiterated by Nathalie Sarraute, who declared she felt bound to go beyond 'the sort of reality other writers, even those whom I most admired, such as Dostoevsky, Proust, Virginia Woolf, or Joyce, had already revealed and so powerfully described'⁴.

Virginia Woolf declared that any serious writer must 'begin by throwing away the method that was in use at the moment'⁵; and both Green's theorizing and that of the principal *nouveaux romanciers* actively demand a 'new era' of fiction. 'A Novelist to His Readers' announces that the 'time has now come for a change' (p.139) to the novel: the new novelist, he suggests 'must always be changing his own style so as not to be trapped by the clichés which he is continually creating for himself' ('ENF', p.23). 'Traditional narrative techniques', Butor similarly felt, were 'incapable of integrating all the new relations' of post-war existence⁶. This is a theme which unites

³ 'New Novel, New Man' [1961], in *Snapshots*, pp.135-41 (137).

⁴ 'New Movements in French Literature: Nathalie Sarraute Explains Tropisms', *Listener* 65 (1961), pp.428-29 (428).

⁵ 'Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown' (1924), in *Collected Essays*, ed. and with a foreward by Leonard Woolf (London: Hogarth Press, 1966), vol.1, pp.319-37 (332).

⁶ 'The Novel as Research', in *Inventory: Essays by Michel Butor*, ed. and trans. with a foreward by Richard Howard (London: Cape, 1970), pp.26-30 (28).

the 'new novelists': the 'New Novel', they agreed, should be protean and infinitely versatile. 'And that forms of fiction are passing, is precisely what the New Novel says!', Robbe-Grillet announced: '*everything is always changing* and [...] there is *always something new* (my emphases)⁷.

The case for such potential parallels between Green's last two novels and the French new novel is certainly strengthened when we examine contemporary artistic developments. In 1938 Beckett's *Murphy* was published in England, and in the same year Sartre's *La Nausée* came out in Paris (its first English edition, significantly, was issued the year before the publication of *Nothing*; printed, moreover, by Green's close friend and former publisher John Lehmann, as *The Diary of Antoine Roquentin*). The popularity of phenomenology during the war prepared the way for the triumphant emergence of existentialism near its end. Both were significant antecedents for the *nouveau roman*, as well as major influences on *Nothing* and *Doting*, and by the mid-1940s were common currency ('Existentialism is upon us', *Horizon* fancifully declared in 1945⁸) in England. Merleau-Ponty's *The Phenomenology of Perception* was published in 1945, followed by Sartre's *Existentialism and Humanism* in 1946. Sarraute's *Portrait of a Man Unknown*, generally considered the first genuine *nouveau roman*, came out in 1947; Green's *Concluding* the following year. From this point on emerge a stream of intriguingly related works in different disciplines. 1950 saw the first performance of Ionesco's *Bald Prima Donna*; the first volume of what would become known as Beckett's Trilogy, *Molloy* (*Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable* following in 1951 and 1952 respectively); Green's *Nothing*, and his supporting theoretical declaration about 'The English Novel of the Future', paralleled in France by Sarraute's 'The Age of Suspicion'. Two years later Green's last novel, *Doting*, was published, followed shortly after by the first wave of 'new novels': Sarraute's *Martereau*, Robbe-Grillet's *The Erasers* (as well as Roland Barthes' influential *Writing Degree Zero*) in 1953, and Michel Butor's *Passage de Milan* in 1954. Their classification as 'new novels' was made nearer the end of the decade, following Sartre's influential preface to Sarraute's reissued *Portrait* in 1957, and formally baptized in *L'Esprit* the following

⁷ 'From Realism to Reality' [1955-63], in *Snapshots and Towards a New Novel*, trans. by Barbara Wright (London: Calder and Boyars, 1965), pp.153-61 (161).

⁸ Rayner Heppenstall, 'Selected Notice', *Horizon* 11:63 (1945), pp.211-15 (211).

year⁹. And, while we can only assert a formal parallelism between Green's final theoretical attitudes and those of the *nouveau roman* - the expression, perhaps, of the *zeitgeist* of the period - Green's position did not go unnoticed. The first significant assessment of Green's writing, an extended article on *Loving*, appeared in summer 1953 in *Lettres Nouvelles*¹⁰; while in a theoretical essay from 1956 ('Conversation and Sub-Conversation') Sarraute discusses the implications of Green's theorizing, effectively appropriating *Nothing* and *Doting* at the same time as proto-*nouveaux romans* - new dialogic novels which, she agreed, represented a potential way forward for modern fiction¹¹.

5.2.2 Formulating the minimalist aesthetic

Nothing and *Doting*, Green declared, take the reader

a step further. They've even been called abstracts, because they're less like - not "reality," that's not the word. Because they're less like appearances ('NTH', p.67).

They contain, he stresses, practically 'no highlights at all'. In 'A Novelist to His Readers' Green similarly dreams of an ideal abstract structure:

what I should like to read and what I am trying to write now, is a novel with an absolute minimum of descriptive passages in it, or even of directions to the reader (p.140).

Green seeks to pare *Nothing* and *Doting* down to a world of surface observation. There is no place in this absolute minimum for the novelist himself, for the project

⁹ Sartre identifies 'penetrating and entirely negative works that may be called anti-novels', which aim to challenge the novel and 'destroy it before our very eyes while seeming to construct it' (in *Portrait of a Man Unknown*, trans. by Maria Jolas (London: Calder, 1959), p.viii).

¹⁰ by Michel Vinaver; see Alan Quinton, 'A French View of *Loving*', *London Magazine* 6:4 (1959), pp.25-35. Green, for his part, praised the article, calling it one of the few worthwhile pieces of criticism on his work ('AF', p.238).

¹¹ Rayner Heppenstall, in the 1960s, similarly saw the parallels between Green's work and that of the *nouveaux romanciers*. The latter he declared exemplified 'a trend which cannot be ignored [...] more stimulating than anything going on at present in our literature' (*The Fourfold Tradition: Notes on the French and English Literatures, with Some Ethnological and Historical Asides* (London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1961), p.270. *The Intellectual Part* (London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1961) explicitly compares the 'high deliberation' of Green to that of Robbe-Grillet (p.199).

'presupposes of course that the writer will keep any direct statement from himself out of his narrative' ('ENF', p.23). This newly minimalist novel, a descendent of Flaubert's aesthetic dream of a novel without external attachments, proclaims the supremacy of form over content, description and direction pared down as much as possible. *Nothing* and *Doting* and Green's theoretical articles display a strategic rigour which directly anticipates the texts of the *nouveaux romanciers*. As John Calder notes, Flaubert's

ideal of the novel as a perfect formal structure, owing little to the world outside it, was taken up after 1950 as a battle-cry [...] One might think that this was nothing more than the old business resurrected of "art for art's sake", and no doubt there was an element of that in it (*Nouveau Roman Reader*, p.15).

Both Green's final novels and those of the *nouveaux romanciers* seek, in Barthes' phrase, the ideal stage of 'writing degree zero'; the novel reduced to a 'perfect formal structure'. Discussing the properties of artistic abstraction, Paul Ricoeur suggests that the 'height of such dissimulation would be that the fiction appears never to have been written'¹²; while Susan Sontag defined the theoretically perfect artifact as a text 'whose surface is so unified and clean, whose momentum is so rapid, whose address is so direct that the work can be... just what it is'¹³. Internal erasures, from the mirrors which erase all trace of the party in *Nothing*, to Robbe-Grillet's obsession with erasers (Wallas' search for the perfect rubber in a novel called *The Erasers*; the stained wall which can only be cleaned with 'a hard, fine-grained eraser' in *Jealousy*; or the falling snow which erases footprints in *In the Labyrinth* until 'the whole surface is even again, intact and unimpaired'¹⁴), offer a common motif.

Nothing and *Doting* are calculatedly ascetic: representation is more easily defined by what it is *not* than what it indeed is: for what it actually *is* is now under scrutiny. As Green told Terry Southern, 'the more you leave out, the more you highlight what you leave in' ('AF', p.246). None of the components of fiction - character, language, description, plot - can be taken for granted any longer. The English novel of the future that Green's theory and final fiction looks towards is streamlined and

¹² 'Between the Text and Its Readers', in *A Ricoeur Reader: Reflection and Imagination*, ed. by Mario J. Valdes (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), pp.390-424 (392).

¹³ Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (1967), p.11.

¹⁴ *The Erasers*, trans. by Richard Howard (London: Calder and Boyars, 1966), p.64; *In the Labyrinth*, trans. by Christine Brooke-Rose (London: Calder and Boyars, 1965), p.64.

schematic, a series of subtractions readily condensed into the following pseudo-scientific equation, or ‘family tree’:

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This radical equation, expressing ‘the main constituents of everyday conversation’, Green warns may not be to everyone’s taste: ‘many [...] will turn away in disgust at what may appear to them to be my low estimate of the content of the novel in the future’ (‘ENF’, p.24). The increasingly provocative minimalism articulated by *Nothing* and *Doting* is the culmination of Green’s experiments in textual sabotage. His austere new vision presents the reader with texts stripped bare, apparently denuded of the traditional constituents of fiction.

5.2.3 The context of post-war abstraction

There are significant parallels between Green’s newly-theorized abstract novel and the increasing dominance of abstract art in the immediate post-war years. Mirroring the period during and immediately after the First World War, the late 1940s and early 1950s saw a resurgence in abstract and experimental forms across most artistic disciplines. Abstract metaphors offered ways of imposing order on the cataclysm, as well as a way of distancing the artist from the human subject (brought into further disrepute, perhaps, by the horrors of war). Certainly such structural analogies, in a devastated Europe financially exhausted and starting the slow process of rebuilding, were quite apt. Green’s predictions for the hypothetical ‘future novel’ make quite clear where his sympathies lie:

For the past several years painting has intended to *avoid representation*, that is to say, *a direct exposition of the objects seen*, and has tended to *look below the surface*, although the medium used has continued to be colour, the purpose of which is of course to appeal to the eye [...] this evolves into a *harmonious whole which may have little direct relation to nature*. Thereby painters produce *something which isn’t*, that is to say, *the result is non-representational*, and yet if and when the painting is successful, it has a life of its own. This is also true of a good novel (‘ENF’, p.21, my

emphases).

Painting and abstract art, then, show the way forward for the novel, in its quest to avoid 'direct exposition', and Green repeatedly uses painterly analogues to try to illustrate what his own work aims to accomplish. For painting - the 'least restricted' of the artistic disciplines, according to Mondrian - had in the twentieth century demonstrated radical ways of surpassing the limits of its medium and this, accordingly, is what Green looks to¹⁵. Even the newly-inadmissible 'highly pointed' descriptions used in Green's previous fiction he states were designed 'to highlight characters and situations very much as a painter will highlight a figure in his picture' ('NTH', p.67). The final fiction's abstractions are a 'selection of material', aiming to achieve an economy of expression similar to those 'Chinese classical painters' who 'used to leave out the middle distance' ('AF', p.240). Green was not alone in seeing such profitable applications in painterly abstraction: over in America Wallace Stevens (like Green, a highly mannered artist who also unusually combined this with business) similarly noted, around this time, that 'I pay just as much attention to painters as I do to writers because, except technically, their problems are the same'. 'They seem', he adds, 'to move in the same direction at the same time'¹⁶.

Green's readiness to seek parallels in other disciplines is of course characteristic, and *Nothing* and *Doting* readily offer, as we shall subsequently be examining, fertile analogies with phenomenology, science, geometry, painting and film. He increasingly uses analogies beyond the novel to explain what he is trying to achieve - fusing prototypically modernist desires with an awareness of advances made in the plastic arts. In defining the final novels as 'non-representational' Green explained, obliquely, that he meant the phrase to represent

a picture which was not a photograph, nor a painting *on a photograph*, nor, in dialogue, a tape-recording [...] when writing I 'represent' very closely what I see (and I'm not seeing so well now) and what I hear (which is little) but I say it is 'non-representational' because it is not necessarily what others see and hear ('AF', p.239).

¹⁵ 'NeoPlasticism in Painting' [1917-18], in Hans L. C. Jaffe, *De Stijl* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1970), pp. 36-93 (37).

¹⁶ Letter from May 1948, in *Letters of Wallace Stevens*, selected and ed. by Holly Stevens (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), p.593.

The metaphors Green uses - going 'beyond the book', seeking to write 'unspoken dialogue', passing beyond appearances - all strain against the boundaries of the text, desirous of advancing 'a step further'. To establish 'a life of its own' the novel must avoid representation; an aesthetic pose which leads him to identify with other mediums. *Nothing* and *Doting*'s abstract structures quest after absolute form, just as Mondrian persistently sought the perfect abstraction in his painting (Michel Seuphor recollecting the latter critically musing, having just completed a new painting, "Don't you think, all the same, that it's just a little bit farther on?"¹⁷). Fiction's 'everlasting life' can naturally only occur, Green suggests, in the minds of his readers, who are expected to interact with the text: 'the purpose of the novelist is to create, in the mind of the reader, life which is *not*' ('ANR', p.142, repeated in 'AF', p.241). Without description, the 'crippling aid of speech', or analysis by the author, Green nevertheless desires his reader to penetrate his abstractions, which must successfully 'rechallenge the reader's conscious imagination' ('ANR', p.136, 'ENF', p.22)

5.2.4 Manifestos of suspicion

Precisely what the new novel should contain preoccupied both Green and the *nouveaux romanciers*. Green's theoretical statements attempt to redefine what is and what is not permissible, and the restrictions and suspicions which *Nothing* and *Doting* adopt, prove to be interestingly similar anxieties to those expressed by the 'new novelists'. The post-war novelist, Butor wrote, feels a 'perpetual uneasiness', partly in response to coming to terms with a world which is 'being transformed with great rapidity'¹⁸. Green's manifestos locate two crucial areas of unease for the novelist: the presentation of character in fiction, and the nature and permissibility of narrative description. Green had come to believe that the writer should only appeal to that 'now unconscious act of imagination' of his readers indirectly, without that 'crippling aid of speech'. Character and description are, in their conventional form, inadmissible according to Green, who instead proposes that the novel must be

¹⁷ *A Dictionary of Abstract Painting: Preceded by a History of Abstract Painting* (London: Methuen, 1958), p.19.

¹⁸ 'The Novel as Research', *Inventory*, p.28.

primarily dialogic, with all narrative exposition or explanation severely restricted. 'A Novelist to His Readers' formulates the scrupulously uncooperative strategies which prevail in *Nothing* and *Doting*. The central point is the essential *unknowability* of other people; an issue which had always preoccupied Green. For, as he rhetorically asks:

do we know, in life, what other people are really like? I very much doubt it. We certainly do not know what other people are thinking and feeling. How then can the novelist be so sure? ('ANR', p.139).

'We get experience, which is as much knowledge as we shall ever have, by watching the way people around us behave', he adds. The representation of character in the final fiction accordingly sticks to what is observable: Green's narrating agencies function as stenographers, recording the words spoken, but never the thoughts behind them. 'Although Green does not eradicate character', Holmesland notes, 'only impersonal appearances remain' (Holmesland, p.224). This produces a deliberately surface account; for while scepticism of character and representation are a continued feature of the earlier fiction¹⁹, new to *Nothing* and *Doting* is the sustained nature of distrust. No access is provided to any of the characters, Green explained, because the

conventional approach by a novelist in which he presumes to know all about his characters, what they are feeling and thinking at any moment, seems to me as dead as the Dodo ('JL', p.164).

And he therefore leaves the hermeneutic gap of interpretation to the reader.

The same declining conviction in the validity of character representation is found in the *nouveau roman*. Sarraute's 1950 essay, 'The Age of Suspicion' (published the same year as Green's first letter to his readers), announced that a new 'age of suspicion' had dawned between novelists and their audience: 'not only are they both wary of the character, but through him, they are wary of each other'. Her article

¹⁹ Samples from *Party Going* and *Concluding* effectively demonstrate this: "'What do we know about anyone?'" (Julia) said, thinking of herself' (PG, p.95); 'no one can be sure they know what others are thinking any more than anyone can say where someone is when they are asleep' (PG, p.144); 'how impossible it is to tell what others are thinking or what, in ordinary life, brings people to do what they are doing' (PG, p.149). In the latter text it is positively choric: "'Noone has any idea of how they are'", "we none of us know, do we?"; "what do either of us know"; "a man can't tell what to believe" (Co, pp.43, 96, 51, 53). This voices the same disbelief as the final fiction: "Oh dear for the matter of that what do we all of us know about anyone?" (N, p.156); "What do we ever really learn about other people? [...] Not to trust the way they look, and that's about all" (D, p.184).

defines “character”, an increasingly suspect label in Green’s work (see section 1.5), as the ‘converging point’ of ‘mutual distrust’ between writer and reader in the new novel. ‘Not only has the novelist practically ceased to believe in his characters, but the reader, too, is unable to believe them’, she declared²⁰. Robbe-Grillet similarly challenged fiction’s previously unshaken belief in ‘the supreme significance of the individual’, noting the altogether new relationship between a novelist and his ‘characters’, whose “depth” ‘we don’t even believe in [...] any more’²¹.

The ‘absolute minimum’ of description seeks to check the signifying power of language, marking a deepening suspicion of the word. For words ‘by themselves [...] can mean almost anything’, and ‘dictionaries get longer every day’ (‘ANR’, p.141). ‘All language is an excess of language’, the narrator of Beckett’s *Molloy* definitively stated the very same year (*Trilogy*, p.107). *Nothing* and *Doting* document Green’s diminishing faith in the writer’s ability to describe. ‘The difficulty before the novelist is to determine how much to describe directly’, he argued (‘ANR2’, p.145). Green’s fears of the power of description, as Philippe Hamon’s study of the role of description in modern narrative notes, threaten to unravel the novel. In a memorable sentence, Hamon compares description to

a sort of figure’s hyperbole, discourse ornament’s ornament, a sort of superlative process whose excess must be controlled carefully²².

In *Nothing* and *Doting* transmission of fact - that ‘wealth of filthy circumstance’, according to Molloy (*Trilogy*, p.59) - is a perilous and hesitant enterprise, failing to bring things under control, and making people and objects alike seem faintly absurd.

The first of Green’s critical manifestos takes a typically mundane situation - a married couple discussing whether or not to go across to the pub - and offers a variety of possible fictional treatments. The final version he settles on does not, crucially, spell out its meaning, as he explains:

Note the “seemed to hesitate”. If you have “he hesitated”, this seems like a stage direction, and is a too direct communication from the author (‘ANR’, p.142).

²⁰ ‘The Age of Suspicion’, in *Tropisms and The Age of Suspicion*, trans. by Maria Jolas (London: Calder, 1963), pp.83-95 (85, 83-84).

²¹ ‘A Path for the Future Novel’ [1956], in *Snapshots*, pp.50-57 (57).

²² ‘Rhetorical Status of the Descriptive’, *YFS* 61 (1981), pp.1-26 (7).

“Seeming” indeed defines Green’s attitude to all statements in *Nothing* and *Doting*, in which narrative description is a perilous venture: people no longer simply *are*, but now merely *seem* (whereas objects, the props of life, most definitely *are*; although these, as we shall see, create their own problems). Such doubts jeopardize the communicative enterprise. ‘The English Novel of the Future’ puts this succinctly:

It is not to be supposed that any reader believes any more of what he is told in narrative than he ordinarily believes in life, of what someone is telling him [...] The novelist should never forget, and in future he will be careful about this, that everything put forward by him, however definite, is taken by the reader with a grain of salt (p.23).

The reason for this new level of mutual communicative ‘disbelief’ is that

there can be no precise meaning in a work of art. A novel should be all things to all men [...] Life itself is capable of several meanings. Therefore the future function of narrative prose is not to be clear. The old definition of good writing - that it should mean what it says - has gone overboard. Narrative prose in future must be as diffuse and variously interpretable as life itself (ibid., p.22).

The writer should ‘not be clear’, should ‘not mean what he says’: his readers must instead desire to participate and wrestle meaning from texts which do not openly disclose their secrets. Green’s adoption of techniques of distrust in his final novels typically forces weak modal expressions onto *Nothing* and *Doting*, so that ‘seeming’ and ‘appearing’ qualify most narratorial observations. They develop upon the covert distrusts which their similarly dialogic predecessor, *Loving*, had formulated²³. The systematic application of these ‘words of estrangement’ results in an entirely conjectural representation. Green’s narrative is studded with perceptual responses which reflect this external perspective: things are frequently ‘plainly’, ‘certainly’ or ‘obviously’, ‘noticeable’ or ‘apparent’. Green’s narrating agencies, perpetually beyond the inner nature of events, have no conspicuous textual privileges.

This technique directly parallels the strategies adopted by the French new

²³ In *Loving*, the most dialogic of Green’s texts before the final novels, we can detect hints of this future hesitancy and awareness of the provisional nature of narrative observation: when Raunce laughs ‘*you could tell* he was distracted’ (p.160); while Edith, standing ‘slack at one of the high windows [...] did not seem to see [...] Also there was a rainbow from the sun on a shower blowing in from the sea but *you could safely say* she took no notice’ (p.84, my emphases). The latter quotation is also a good example of Green’s typical attention to questions of perspective.

novelists, in which the authority of narration is repeatedly questioned. Laurent Le Sage writes that the average *nouveau roman* narrator can only

from his limited point of view [...] conjecture. "Perhaps", "Probably", "Doubtless" stud his sentences to show the reader he does not know the truth himself. As we follow his unsure steps, we feel we are losing our foothold in the real²⁴.

As Robbe-Grillet observes of Beckett's work,

plenty of things happen, but they are always questioning themselves, doubting themselves and destroying themselves to the point where the same phrase can contain a statement and its immediate negation²⁵.

Contradictions, statements which question themselves and destroy themselves, accurately reflect the fact that the 'various meanings we still find in the world around us are now only partial, provisional, contradictory even, and always in dispute' ('New Novel', p.140). Robbe-Grillet talks of 'descriptions whose movement destroys all confidence in the things described': in Green's texts estrangement dwells in the very provisionality of response, which stresses just how far the narrative function is unwilling to authenticate the descriptions and observations that it is technically responsible for: all relaying of information is excessively cautious. Even the identification of speakers in *Nothing* and *Doting* and the tone in which they speak is typically unhelpful: contradictory adjectives and estranged narrational observations, 'nouns and adjectives that undermine rather than define', as Valerie Minogue elegantly discovers in Sarraute's fiction, undercut the presentation²⁶. *Doting's* Annabel exhibits 'a sort of humble rage', or 'what appeared to be humble indignation' (p.52); later she 'almost cooed, and yet seemed alerted, defensive' (p.128). Adverbial qualifiers of doubt and speculation ('perhaps', 'possibly', 'maybe', 'seemed') define the outer limits of authorial knowledge: neither author nor narrator, Green suggests, are any more privileged, analysing the text's characters, than the reader.

²⁴ *The French New Novel: An Introduction and a Sampler* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1962), p.27.

²⁵ 'On Some Outdated Notions' [1957], in *Snapshots*, pp.58-74 (64).

²⁶ *Nathalie Sarraute and the War of Words: A Study of Five Novels* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981), p.136.

5.2.5 The dialogic text

Green's permitted 'absolute minimum' leaves *Nothing* and *Doting* reliant on lengthily transcribed dialogues linked by brief narrative exposition. Narration is increasingly quotation. 'A Novelist to His Readers' justifies the future dialogic novel's status:

we learn almost everything in life from what is done after a great deal of talk [...] communication between human beings has now come to be almost entirely conducted by conversation ('ANR', pp.140, 137).

According to this new philosophy, then,

the novelist's approach must be oblique. In life the intimations of reality are nearly always oblique [...] Accordingly, the treatment of dialogue by the novelist will be *oblique*, that is to say, *there should be no direct answers in dialogue* ('ENF', p.23, my emphases).

In *Nothing* and *Doting*, he suggests, the reader must take on the burden of signification, the assessment of what may (or indeed may not) lie beneath these flatly reported words: 'the reader is left to supply the shapes and colors out of his own head' ('DL', p.87).

The second startling property of Green's new novel is his contention that 'it is what is left unsaid which gives us food for thought' ('ANR', p.141). The sample passage the article quotes from *Nothing* (a typical stretch of recorded dialogue) has, he suggests, by its drastic reduction of description, already moved much closer to this new ideal of interpretative openness, a plurality of meaning which allows characters to be '*in three or more moods at the same time*' (p.141). The future dialogic novel must be able to 'mean something different on the part of each person who sees it' and, 'if it comes off', be 'all things to all men' ('ENF', p.21). But the dialogues of *Nothing* and *Doting*, as if playing deliberately hard to get, are repetitive, hermetic, and linguistically dull. As Norman Page notes, Green thereby

places a burden on speech which it does not have to carry in real life, where meaning is supplemented, reinforced or qualified by gesture, facial expression, vocal tone, etc, or indeed in most novels. Nor

does the language used seem to be of a quality that enables it to carry such a burden easily: Green uses for his mainly upper-middle-class characters a social dialect very limited in its resources: *wonderful* (often *rather wonderful*) is its all-purpose term of praise, displeasure is conveyed by *rotten* or *awful*, and *darling* is a universal and meaningless form of address (Page, p.130).

Green further burdens these observation-free dialogues by recording speech without much punctuation (this is largely absent in *Nothing*, and significantly curtailed in *Doting*), the removal of obvious inflection making these decidedly undramatic dialogues all the more opaque. As Michael Gorra notes, these conversations seem to ‘prefigure Harold Pinter’s, letting the reader’s own voice find the places where commas ought to be, but aren’t’²⁷.

Having deliberately forgone the advantages of ‘poetic’ or ‘literary’ language in favour of the consciously impoverished language of his subjects, Green makes the task facing the reader of *Nothing* and *Doting* doubly difficult. Some of his critics have indeed questioned this strategy: is there anything worthwhile to detect behind these attenuated dialogues? Mengham, for instance, concludes that the apparent lack of depth means that ‘in a sense, there is almost nothing to read for in *Doting* [...] All that holds the reader’s interest is the comedy’ (Mengham, p.214). Depth, then, is the issue at stake here. However, the need to penetrate ‘beneath the surface’, to pierce the novelist’s abstractions, is a familiar requirement to Green’s readers: in *Nothing* and *Doting* the stakes are simply higher, since the reader’s willingness to interact with the text, and in particular with these carefully bland, repetitive dialogues, is crucial. Ionesco approvingly wrote how ‘nothing seems more surprising than the banal’²⁸, which provides an effective motif for Green’s new strategy. For, as Page, softening his stance, adds, it is what lies ‘beneath the surface’ which is of interest,

the process of discerning the unspoken hopes and fears, thoughts and motivations, to which the words uttered often act as a smokescreen (Page, p.131).

5.2.6 Shared detective motifs

²⁷ *The English Novel at Mid-Century: From the Leaning Tower* (London: Macmillan, 1990), p.54.

²⁸ quoted in Wylie Sypher, *Loss of the Self in Modern Literature and Art* (New York: Vintage Books, 1962, p.96).

Green's method, as Nigel Dennis first noted,

belongs to the detective-story writer as well as to the poet, and those who find him hard to take will find him much easier if they imagine his characters to be actors in a fanciful whodunit. He meets all the requirements of the exacting crime reader, except that he does not provide a full explanation of his mysteries in the last chapter. Instead, he supplies all the clues the reader needs - and leaves him to draw his own conclusions [...] When the reader possesses a true detective spirit, his pages give an impression of steadily expanding illumination in which the characters present new facets of themselves and their relationships with every line they speak ('DL', p.88).

Dennis was writing to coincide with the American publication of *Nothing* and *Doting*, and his suggested reading offers a useful approach to the final novels, as well as highlighting an aspect of Green's work which again provides a fascinating link with the French new novels. The characters of Green's final novels are keen detectives themselves, always trying to fathom each other's motivations and look beneath the surface of what is said - as indeed *Nothing's* Liz tells Dick Abbot, one must look "through the surface [...] deep down to what really's there" (pp.103-4). Green's characters certainly acknowledge this: John declares that "It's not so much what [Jane] puts into words as everything she doesn't mention" (p.135); in *Doting* Annabel reminds Claire that "it's quite fantastic what goes on!" (p.198), just as Claire herself agrees that "surely simply everything has supreme importance, if it happens" (p.215).

The need to penetrate surfaces is a common requirement in the *nouveau roman*. Nathalie Sarraute, similarly, defined dialogue as a 'close [...] savage game' of 'actions and reactions'²⁹. In her novels, she declared, the 'most ordinary words are used but what is said is not what is being talked about'³⁰. Indeed, a common preoccupation of both Green's novels and those of the new novelists is the importance of detective-style paradigms and motifs. This points to their mutual interest in hermeneutic questions, and the necessary relationship between novelist and reader. Unsurprisingly, detective story archetypes can be found throughout Green's work. His earlier novels frequently adopt and subvert detective story paradigms, incorporating murders and disappearances left unsolved; criminal

²⁹ 'Conversation and Sub-Conversation', in *Tropisms*, pp.97-120 (109).

³⁰ quoted in Ruth Z. Temple, *Nathalie Sarraute* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), p.40. Green was just as sensitive to the hidden aggressiveness of most dialogue exchanges, noting how 'People strike sparks off each other, that is what I try to note down' ('AF', p.239).

investigations abandoned and suspects improperly questioned; incompetent detective parodies; and the frustrating of neat resolutions. *Party Going* and *Concluding* both use many of the staple ingredients of the mystery genre - crimes, witnesses, conflicting evidence, detectives, and a confined cast of suspects - yet both end, as Dennis notes, as they start, 'everything unexplained' (*PG*, p.7). What interests Green is the *expectation* of resolution, not the resolution itself. In *Concluding* whether Mary is 'the body under the flowers, a corpse' or 'floated three inches under water' (pp.104, 112), and who is or is not responsible, is a matter of much debate³¹. The Institute's rules are also peculiar: they are not allowed to properly question Merode; and although the police are summoned they are 'instructed [...] not to make a search' (p.20). The novel teasingly refers to things 'for that matter [...] still going on, perhaps' (p.122), and ends without a satisfactory denouement, its enigmas intact, with the half-deaf, half-blind figure of Rock shuffling to bed, confirming to himself what has all along been alleged, that it has been, on the whole, 'a nice day', in place of the expected. As Gertrude Stein wrote, 'Anything is a detective story if it can be found out and can anything be found out'³²; an observation definitely true of Green's novels, which all have something of the detective story in them.

Much the same is true of the *nouveau roman*. The new novelists actively embraced detective story archetypes: their novels, as Betty Rahv suggests, have 'a commonly acknowledged "puzzle" aspect, causing them frequently to be compared to the mystery or detective story'³³. Both Green and the *nouveaux romanciers* demand the textual participation of their readers: detective story motifs clearly indicate the desired reading strategy. We therefore find numerous detective or detective figures engaged in hermeneutic quests; repeated references to Greek

³¹ It is variously suggested, for instance, that she is in the habit of secretly dating men late at night; others claim that she has run away, either due to overwork, or gone adrift with some boyfriend. There is also the issue of Rock's cottage, and the potential ways the dispute over its ownership (for "'Houses are that short there's no-one safe'" (p.10)) might strangely connect to her disappearance. Edge, looking for an excuse to lever the sage from his home, slyly asks the sergeant to consider those "'men of an age [...] who, from what one hears and reads, are more liable to let themselves collapse in that disgraceful way'" (p.94); Adams, whose increasingly irrational behaviour makes him a prime suspect, counter-accuses the Rocks on just these grounds, of having "'done away with 'er yourselves, for a dark purpose'" (p.160).

³² *The Geographical History of America or The Relation of Human Nature to the Human Mind* ([n.p.]: Random House, 1933), p.84.

³³ *From Sartre to the New Novel* (New York: Kennikat Press, 1974), pp.19-20.

tragedy (Theseus, labyrinths, Oedipus, and so on); overt detective story structures (as in Robbe-Grillet's *The Erasers* and *The Voyeur*, Ollier's *La Mise en scène*, and Butor's *Passing Time*), or teasing suggestions of mysteries left unspecified or unsolved.

The Oedipal scenario, from *Blindness*'s curious oedipal obsessions, Green's own difficulties with his father in real-life and those threatening father-figures in the fiction, to faint yet disconcerting echoes in the fiction (*Party Going*'s nannies likened to a Greek Chorus; Middlewitch disconcertingly talking of beggars at crossroads in *Back*), is a recurrent theme in the novels, particularly so in *Nothing*. Fear that they might accidentally be "brother and sister for one thing" (p.22) propels Philip and Mary to undertake their own mini-Oedipal quest. Philip declares that it is "absurd that we shouldn't know" (p.23) and, as in the myth, sabotages his happiness as a result. Of course, as the title of the novel implies, there is nothing in all this, yet it proves the undoing of their engagement. Jokes about Oedipal dilemmas run through the novel: Philip declares that all parents "ought to be liquidated" (p.69); he in turn is criticised by his mother for having a ridiculous "family complex" (p.227). Recalling Oedipus' similarly fateful decision to investigate his parentage, she also wonders how "some people seem doomed to bring terrible great trials on themselves" (p.221). And, of course, Oedipus himself is the archetypal solver of mysteries: the detective, as Michel Butor notes, 'is a true son of the murderer Oedipus, not only because he solves a riddle, but also because [...] without crimes, without mysterious crimes, what would he be?'³⁴.

The new novels delight in frustrating the reader's expectations of narrative. The detective story, the new novelists were at pains to point out, reverses linearity. Butor's *Passing Time* notes how 'in detective fiction the story goes against the stream, beginning with the crime, the climax of all the dramatic events which the detective has to re-discover gradually'³⁵. In *The Erasers* Robbe-Grillet playfully offers a detective who commits the very crime he has been sent to investigate. Parodic detectives, like this 'so-called special agent' Wallas, or the unnamed narrator

³⁴ *Passing Time*, trans. by Jean Stewart (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), pp.135-36.

³⁵ Butor explains: 'this, though it may disconcert some readers, is quite natural, since obviously in real life it is only after having met somebody that we take an interest in his previous actions, and only too often it is not until some disaster has struck our lives that we wake up enough to trace its origins' (p.156).

of Sarraute's *Martereau*, whose attempts at surveillance end in the conclusion that the text is 'a game of mirrors in which I lose my way' (p.243), are equally a feature of Green's texts, from the ersatz "detective" who follows Miss Fellowes about, making obscure allegations (her doctor, he claims, has "killed any number of them, when they've been carried in" (PG, p.205), to the incompetent sergeant in *Concluding*, a caricature village policeman with his 'traditional' face and 'traditional attitude' (pp.90, 148), cycling around on his bicycle, or *Loving*'s insurance agent, cutting an absurd figure with his feigned lisp and detective-style grey homburg hat clashing with blue spats. All are incompetent investigators (conspicuously so in the case of *Concluding*'s sergeant, whose every action teases the reader's expectations of how a detective should behave)³⁶. This sense of going 'against the stream' is also strong in Green's novels: *Back* figuratively ends before it starts (in the opening scene Charley mourns the dead Rose; the text ends with him reunited with her double); the overt detective stories, *Concluding* and *Party Going*, are prefaced by 'crimes' which the texts then partly work back to explain (*Concluding*'s Institute's regulations moreover bizarrely insist that the official report of Mary's disappearance must precede the investigation into it (p.131)); while Mary and Philip's investigation into their possible kinship achieves what it sets out to disprove³⁷.

5.3 NOTHING, DOTING AND THE GEOMETRIC ART

5.3.1 Geometry and science

Interviewed in 1950, Green declared that:

³⁶ Talking to Rock, the sergeant reaches 'into a pocket for what the older man was sure would be the official notebook, but which turned out to be his handkerchief'. He remembers moments later, none too convincingly, what he should be doing ("I'd best get on up. Take particulars" (p.73)), but displays little taste for investigation. Rather than cross-examine Edge's plainly wild evasions, he decides 'he must pretend he did not understand' (p.94), and when he appears at the lake it is not to investigate the potential scene of the crime: 'the truth was the sergeant had come only for a look around [...] Also he was parched for a cup of tea' (p.151).

³⁷ Fearing groundlessly that they might be brother and sister, they ask around about their respective parents; this backfires, and they abandon their engagement at the same time as their parents decide to marry each other after all.

I have to make my opening statement and for the remaining seven-eighths of the novel revolve around it, which may make me a minor writer, but which, upon consideration, may be the modern outcome (Breit, p.105).

The 'modern outcome' realized in Green's final novels is the celebration of structure and form over content. In *Nothing* and *Doting* description, plot and character are subordinated to a new self-conscious language of absolute form.

Each scene in *Nothing* and *Doting* neatly counters or contrasts to the next, and within them characters are grouped and regrouped in constant rotation, the text's circles, rotations and modifications weaving an elaborate fabric of spirals. Like Wallace Stevens, who wrote in *Notes towards a Supreme Fiction* of

the vast repetitions final in
Themselves and, therefore, good, the going round
And round and round, the merely going round,
Until merely going round is a final good³⁸,

Green's new novel is, first and foremost, a structure, composed of interlocking sections built around a largely circular core, its textual motion characterized by repetition and circularity. These novels, and the corresponding theoretical statements, are preoccupied with technical and constructional issues, drawing freely upon architectural metaphors and technical terminology. This celebration of structure over content - which directly anticipates the concerns of the *nouveau roman* movement - results in fiction which can be described as being increasingly geometric. Geometry aspires to measure the perceptual world, to introduce perspective, and for this reason alone is an apt metaphor. It also imposes order onto that perspective. Both Green and the *nouveaux romanciers* accordingly frequently employ geometric analogies and tropes in their novels - a commonly-noted feature of the *nouveaux romans* is their quasi-scientific approach, what Gibson calls a 'fantasy of a geometric clarity, symmetry and proportion to narrative or the narrative text'³⁹.

The supremacy of form also compensates for the increasingly abstracted or stylized content. Green suggests that in this novel of the future, given the studied blandness of the new writer's vocabulary, communication will be cumulative: it will

³⁸ *Notes towards a Supreme Fiction*: 'It Must Give Pleasure' IX, ll.10-14, in *Selected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1953).

³⁹ *Towards a Postmodern Theory of Narrative* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), p.3.

be the 'piling up of the context of words which alone has meaning, as tones are the context of a painting' ('ENF', p.22; again Green resorts to analogies from painting). Form, therefore, offers a secondary context, a specifically *structural* way of expressing ideas which bypasses the problems of signification. Blocks of text relate to each other and to their position in the wider structural edifice. As J. M. Cocking hypothesizes, this shift moves from

the idea of representing the real world to the idea of representing the artist's inner reality - at which point lines, shapes and volumes, perspectives, planes and rhythms, colours and plays of light become a specific language, a means of self-expression with impacts and imports other than those of words⁴⁰.

Nothing, Doting and the *nouveaux romans* subordinate content, plot, and prose to such features. The painstaking and empirical descriptions, cataloguing and meticulously describing objects, coupled with the new novelists' disinterest in psychological explanations, greatly contributed to their notoriety. Robbe-Grillet claimed in defence of his pseudo-objective approach that science offers 'the only honest means at man's disposal whereby he can make use of the world around him'⁴¹. He had, interestingly, originally trained as a scientist, just as Claude Simon began as a painter. Science was, of course, seemed peculiarly attractive at this point to both Green and the *nouveaux romanciers*, with its mystique of precision which Flaubert's novel without attachments, or Rimbaud's "alchemy of the word" aspire to. A characteristic trait of many *nouveaux romans*, therefore, is their unusually architectural vocabulary. They too articulate a new cubist language of 'shapes and volumes... planes and rhythms', drawing repeated parallels, perspectives, obliques, verticals and horizontals, symmetries, circles, spirals, loops, and right-angles. The text of *In the Labyrinth* enthuses about the snow falling to form 'renewed spirals, scrolls, forked undulations, arabesques in motion' (p.9). Adhering to this new geometrical language, Butor claimed that he could

compose a novel only after having studied its construction for months, only at the point when I find myself in possession of diagrams [...] Armed with that instrument, that compass, or if you prefer, that provisional map, I begin my exploration, I begin my revision⁴².

⁴⁰ 'The "nouveau roman" in France', *Essays in French Literature* 2 (1965), pp.1-14 (2).

⁴¹ 'Nature, Humanism and Tragedy' [1958], in *Snapshots*, pp.75-95 (91).

⁴² quoted by John K. Simon, 'Perception and Metaphor in the "New Novel": Notes on Robbe-Grillet, Claude Simon and Butor', *Tri-Quarterly* 4 (1965), pp.153-82 (175).

Green's hypothesized 'English Novel of the Future' itself suggests that the "new novel" could well now be 'expressed in a family tree', which is to say - like a scientific equation. His background in engineering no doubt contributed to this, for his texts had long shown sensitivity to technical features - the unexpected typographical symbols of *Living* (fractions, pound and shilling marks, percentages and so on); or the introverted engineer Charley Summers, who starts to dream of his secretary in terms of 'needle valves in stainless [steel] ... break vacuum cocks... accessible traps' (*Ba*, p.44). Similarly prominent in his earlier texts are questions of line and perspective. 1927's 'Test Trial at Lords' is an impressionist prose piece, all masses, eddies, curves and lateral movements, and the great crowd scenes of *Living* and *Party Going* preserve much of this enthusiasm. Both autobiography and *Living*, of course, are notably enthusiastic about the charm of the machine, the 'wild incidental beauty in these things where engineers had thought only of the use put to them', as Dick Dupret tells himself (p.7), or the (less satirical) elegy over Bert Jones at work on a job 'revolving so many turns a second, now it had a stillness more beautiful than when actually it had been still' (p.196).

5.3.2 Internal circular tropes

Circular images and tropes recur throughout the fiction. Charley Summers' factory produces, appropriately enough, something called *parabolam*, a punning fusion of science and geometry which hints at Green's own wider textual manoeuvres. *Concluding*, a few years later, is as full of internal geometrical exercises as any *nouveau roman*. Rock's cottage stands as a central focal point in the carefully symmetrical grounds of the Institute 'like the hub of a wheel, on a spot at which several rides meet' (p.72). Inside the sanctum geometrical patterns establish a 'precise and radiating perspective' (p.12); symmetries so precise that Merode will be 'mesmerised' by its seemingly-endless vistas of 'black and white receding pavements' (p.69). And Green inserts a series of internal *mises en abîmes*, tropes for his new circular passions: Sebastian's metaphor for the little world of the Institute and its inhabitants all "spinning like tops on our own axis" (p.118), or the discovery

of Merode in the woods, whose torn pyjama leg reveals a knee that the narrator likens to 'a piece of tusk burnished by shifting sands, or else a wheel revolving at such speed that it had no edges' (p.56: the image recalls Bert Jones' foundry-work). Both are highly symbolic formulations of textual concerns. And in the dramatic set-piece climax of the novel, the Founder's Day waltz, the entire world of *Concluding* metaphorically rotates to the music: the narrator imagines that 'the whole edifice began to turn, even wooden pins which held the panelling noiselessly revolved to the greater, ever greater sound' (p.200).

More internal *mises en abîmes* also appear in the increasingly self-referential *Nothing* and *Doting*. Mary in *Nothing*, and Campbell Anthony in *Doting*, engage in literary or constructional activities which mirror the novels they appear in. Both texts also feature performing artists executing emblematically geometric movements. Each novel opens with a paradigmatic image of studied textual artifice, inner mirrors reflecting the image of the narrative itself. In *Nothing*'s hotel restaurant with 'a conjurer's flourish' Jane and Richard's meal is served: an 'act' is performed as the food is served from 'a trolley crowned by a dome of chromium', laid out in an 'almost magical presentation'. The potatoes are dished out 'one by one, around her portion in the loving way a jeweller will lay out great garnets beside the design to which he is to work, before the setting is begun'. Finally, the ritual complete, the trolley is 'withdrawn, Pascal's act over' (pp.14-15). The performance mirrors in miniature Green's structural concerns, his theory that the writer starts and then revolves about his start: it is a typically self-referential device which reflects textual strategy; just as the novel's title, *Nothing*, implies an absence of meaning, an emptiness at its centre, which this trope, the artisan-creator carefully arranging his material symmetrically around the margins, deliberately mirrors. This episode therefore establishes the framework within which the narrative will unfold.

Green repeats this in *Doting*, which both opens and closes with another self-referential device, a juggler who performs at the two parties. The juggler, an obvious symbol of circularity, introduces his balls

one at a time, one more after another, [...] higher each time to give six, seven balls room until, to no applause, he had a dozen chasing themselves up then down into his two lazy-seeming hands, each ball so precisely placed that it could be thought to follow grooves in violet air (p.7).

He carefully balances them, just as Green, the juggler-author, balances his structural components. Like an author or master of ceremonies, the juggler introduces the novel and reappears at its conclusion, signalling that events have turned full circle, and that the performance is now complete. The parallels are clear: both juggler and author produce a dextrous balancing act. The juggler is significantly 'unnoticed by our party', and finishes his act with a feat of skill completed with panache, 'to a faint look of surprise, the artist' (p.8).

Such games are typical tropes for the artist in Green's work. In this example the juggler uses specifically *billiard* balls: and billiards, as *Pack My Bag* records, was one of Green's passions (indeed, Alan Ross remembers that Green's autobiographical sequel was supposed to be loosely organised around this passion). Its very abstract, geometrical nature was what appealed; the charm, Green wrote, of 'going through movements geometrically exact' and celebrating the 'ordered evolutions each must roll softly through' (*PMB*, p.177). This, of course, reminds him of another highly abstract sport, the Eton Wall Game, 'the most abstract of all to watch except billiards' (p.135). The pleasure of things 'geometrically exact' is similarly expressed by *Doting's* other star turn, the exotic dancer. She too traces geometric movements, moving 'opened fingers in figures of eights', set against the jerky movements of the 'mechanically operated snakes thrust forth on springs' out of her basket (pp.3-4). And so both dancer and magician, in tracing their geometric patterns, deliberately mirror the wider geometries of Green's construction.

5.3.3 Narrative polyphony

Nothing and *Doting's* narratives are as circular as such tropes of circularity and rotation suggest. Both contain a series of varied structural groupings. Most scenes are structurally related to various others, either in terms of location, personnel, or subject matter. Many of these encounters seem suspiciously similar: they often reexamine the same events or topics from different angles, or virtually duplicate past meetings. The plot is advanced by a mixture of variance and repetition, placing the reader

in a God-like position, enjoyed by none of the characters, to compare X's conversation on a given

topic with Y with the version he gives to Z [...] and so forth: to detect, that is, the conscious and unconscious inconsistencies (Page, p.129).

Green actually suggested that 'the superimposition of one scene on another' and the 'telescoping of two scenes into one', were the ways his new novel could achieve 'substance and depth' ('ANR2', p.145). This replaces traditional narrative diegesis with a specifically *structural* exposition. These novels, Green declared, aimed to demonstrate 'how a reader can be brought by the description, by the treatment, to a deeper realisation of what is being described' (p.144). He adds: 'the way in which the writer places his characters in the shifting scenes of his book will give the work significance' (p.145). This statement, basically, delineates the significance of writing according to geometrical principles, armed like Butor with a figurative compass, and is not too far in theory from Robbe-Grillet's texts, where endless repetitions (in this case, of descriptions), seem, in Genette's words, to perhaps resemble 'an effort to constitute a narrative (a *story*) almost exclusively by means of descriptions imperceptibly modified from one page to the next' (*Figures*, p.135).

Repetition is important in *Nothing* and *Doting*. It at once symbolizes Green's circular obsessions, the similarly self-conscious degree of constructional stylization; as well as his new interest in formulas of duplication. *Pack My Bag*'s insights into memory and repetition - the idea of writing as a 'regular turn' in which ordinary events can be discussed and repeated endlessly and inexhaustibly - certainly influence *Nothing*, where Green's characters discuss and revise trivial events as painstakingly as the infamous repetitions of the *nouveaux romans* (like the multiple versions of the mock-wedding of John Pomfret to Penelope which Green's cast tell and retell). In addition to Green's repetitive formulas denoting time and space, we also find consciously duplicate sequences. Compare, for instance, two passages near the start of *Nothing*. In the first of these John and Liz are sitting down to lunch:

He reached across and laid his hand over hers on top of the white table cloth. Her nails were scarlet. He stroked the bare ring finger (p.10).

When they leave the narrative then switches to Jane and Richard at a similar table:

Reaching across she laid a hand over his on the white tablecloth. Her nails were scarlet. She gently scratched the skin by his thumbnail (p.11).

At this early stage Green signals the repetitive instincts of his narrative, a world of parallel incidents and circular prose descriptions. The repetition is structurally significant, as well, for it obliquely anticipates the final structural pairing of the novel, in which Jane and John, the more active members in each pairing, abandon their original partners and decide to marry each other. In the new dialogic text, moreover, the relative lack of descriptive passages makes any reported actions seem that much more significant for their rarity. That these should also be repetitions further emphasizes the new level of circularity in Green's work (the gesture recurs later, in modified fashion, when Mary takes Philip's hand 'under the table, stroked the ring finger with her thumb. A silence drew across them' (p.140)). Green's repetitions succeed in obliging the reader to focus on the minor differences in statements which, were their similarities not emphasized, might otherwise have passed unnoticed. From such minor clues the attentive reader can hypothesize John will be more passive than Liz; and sense that Philip and Mary's relationship is doomed from the surreptitious gesture and silence pregnant with disaster. And so

In this fashion *Nothing* and *Doting* play out their narratives, texts slowly accomplished through innumerable minor variations. Green's characters, as these examples suggest, meet in structurally contrasted pairs. Jane and John independently suggest, 'at the same time on the identical day' to their respective children, that they are contemplating remarrying:

"Philip what would you say if I married a second time?" (Jane, p.33)

"What would you say if your devoted parent married a second time?" (John, p.35).

And the novel will shortly be concluded when these prophecies come true as, at the same time on the 'same evening', in identical circumstances, and again separated by a few pages, in consecutive scenes, they again announce that:

"As a matter of fact [...] I actually am about to marry again, so there you are" (p.227)

"The fact is I really might marry once more this time" (p.229).

In these repetitious mirrored scenes even movements are choreographed. Green's characters meet in contrasted pairs in similar seats; or, like Philip and Mary,

duplicate each other's movements (the two unwittingly travel independently to Brighton, on the same train, not knowing 'what the other had done' and without seeing 'one another on the way down' (p.55), nor meeting subsequently when they in turn interview first Jane and then Arthur Morris). *Nothing* ends reversing its start: the text opens with scenes featuring first Jane and Richard, then John and Liz; and concludes with rearranged pairs, Liz and Richard, Jane and John (which represents a further rotation, since in going out with each other Jane and John moreover revive a liaison some twenty years old). With structural neatness Green's narrator observes how these pairs swap positions as well as partners:

John Pomfret took Mrs Weatherby to lunch at the hotel and was shown to the table he had been given so often when entertaining Liz. As he sat down he looked round and saw Dick Abbot playing host to Miss Jennings, again at the very spot where Jane had so often been a guest of the man's (p.219).

The trick is repeated in *Doting*. Arthur arranges to offload Annabel onto Charles Addinsell at their usual restaurant (p.124). This accomplished, he attempts to patch up his marriage over dinner a few nights later, 'at the restaurant to which he'd taken Ann' (p.145). Later, in a further gyration of personnel, we find Charles now taking Claire out, to, as usual, the 'bar of the very restaurant in which Middleton used to give Miss Paynton lunch' (p.205). Circles and half-circles: *Nothing*'s characters swap partners; *Doting*'s characters come together and move apart in a series of complicated manoeuvrings. Arthur dallies with Ann but does not leave his wife, while she half-heartedly contemplates revenging herself with his best friend (who confesses, moreover, that "I was in love with Di before [Arthur] married her" (p.125). Arthur hands Ann over to Charles who instead ends up dating her best friend Claire. *Doting* ends more or less having come full-circle. The novel opens

with a quartet of voices over dinner [...] and it ends with another dinner [...] at which the number of participants has grown to six, reflecting the complications of relationships with which the novel is concerned. Between these two occasions lies a series of duets, trios, and other groupings (Page, p.129).

The elegant counterpoint of these structurally 'shifting' and rotating scenes is made possible by the fact that *Doting*'s characters are, as Claire and Ann put it, "expendable". Unable to feel strong emotions, relationships are a matter of chance,

since the participants are all more or less interchangeable - the logical extension, in fact, of the scepticism of character his work had always expressed. Here geometry, stressing the combinations and positions of his cast, functions as an art of alienation (just as it does in the *nouveau roman*), stressing the distance between the novel's characters, and the world they inhabit.

Such narrative polyphony is a staple ingredient in the fictions of Sarraute, Robbe-Grillet or Claude Simon, in which each

description forms a 'discursive point' in the combination and repetition of which, with a play of variants in the repetitions, the novel is accomplished⁴³.

All *nouveaux romans*, Jean Ricardou noted, can be abstracted to just such a 'collection of autonomous variants'⁴⁴. This is a familiar aspect often self-consciously discussed in the new novels: Robbe-Grillet's *Jealousy* reflexively notes how 'these repetitions, these tiny variations, halts, regressions, can give rise to modifications - though barely perceptible - eventually moving quite far from the point of departure'⁴⁵; while the narration of Philippe Sollers' *The Park* refers to scenes 'Scarcely distinct, but slightly changed (yet in such a way that they are found one day to be entirely new)', which are then 'endlessly repeated'⁴⁶. In Ms Sarraute's tropistic texts, similarly, the tiniest indications frequently contain the most momentous differences. For the *nouveaux romanciers* 'indiscernable variations' and 'gradual modifications' (*The Park*, p.92) are fundamental strategies, keywords which recur throughout texts and critical statements (Butor even gave one of his novels the title *La Modification*). Like *Nothing* and *Doting*, these texts also repeat endlessly, filled with descriptions which perpetually reconstruct and revise the observed world.

5.3.4 Constructional geometries

⁴³ Stephen Heath, *The Nouveau Roman: A Study in the Practice of Writing* (London: Elek Books, 1972), p.112.

⁴⁴ 'Nouveau roman, Tel Quel', in *Surfiction: Fiction Now... And Tomorrow*, ed. by Raymond Federman (Chicago: Swallow Press, 1975), pp.101-33 (120, 21).

⁴⁵ *Jealousy*, trans. by Richard Howard (London: Calder, 1960), p.51.

⁴⁶ *The Park*, trans. by A. M. Sheridan Smith (London: Calder and Boyars, 1968), p.83.

Time and description in *Nothing* and *Doting* are highly abstract. Narrative segments are concluded with the minimum of description, edited down to brief linking phrases, usually disposing of intervening time as summarily as possible. Setting is kept to a minimum, and episodes fade out when their purpose has been served. They appear to have been skilfully edited, terminating exactly when dialogue ceases to be relevant, as the opening scenes of *Nothing* demonstrate:

“let’s go back” > And they left (p.11);

“Let’s go now” > in a few minutes they left (p.21)

Like stage directions in a play, they signal characters’ exits before the segments end:

presently they left (p.28); At this [...] they both left (p.35); Mary got up and left (p.40); getting up to go at once (p.49).

Episodes ending with one character proposing either to do, or not to do, something, are generally followed by segments observing the outcome: the passage of time is assumed to be irrelevant, which simplifies the edifice of the text, emphasizing the degree of textual patterning and perceptual intervention involved⁴⁷. Such narrative patterning implies there is indeed nothing else beyond the static moments the text records, that literally *nothing* has happened of even remote interest since the last sequence to be presented (and it is variously stated that: ‘Nothing else of consequence passed that night’; ‘without anything else of significance having passed’ (*D*, pp 102, 226)). *Doting* refers to ‘indifferent subjects’ (pp.129, 204) which have been excised; *Nothing* to conversations which ‘limp’ (p.186), change to irrelevant subjects (p.151), or cease to be ‘serious’ (p.219). Reality is edited down to the salient details abstracted by Green’s narrating agencies, much as film directors shoot surplus footage which will later be edited down on the cutting-room floor (*Nothing*’s celebrated mirror passage suggests something similar: ‘so much had been recorded only to be lost’ (p.107)).

⁴⁷ In *Nothing*, for instance, Mary extracts the promise from her father that he will not discuss with Jane the question of Philip and their parentage; the next scene presented, ‘within the next forty-eight hours’ (p.180), has him inviting her round to do just that. In similar fashion, after Jane suggests he might dispatch Mary off to Italy, the following segment immediately cuts, ‘within a few evenings later’, to John posing that very same idea (pp.195-6).

The text, and by implication writing itself, are forms of collage, the text as a shaped artifact. Awareness of the text as potential collage - indebted to cubist disintegrations of the object, cinematic montage, in particular the modernist construction-by-fragments that *The Waste Land* famously epitomizes - is, as section 3.4.2 suggests, a recurrent theme in Green's fiction. Green's peculiar stylistic strategies persistently compare writing to defacement, and paradigmatic restatements of this strategy are made in his novels. In *Nothing* Mary is paid to "snip bits out of the newspapers, stick them on folio sheets" (p.39). Like the text's narrating agency, she scissors and pastes items onto blank sheets of paper. For *Nothing* resembles a collection of excerpts, apparently arbitrary social encounters cut from a much wider frame of day-to-day existence, and diligently pasted together, also separated by blank spaces on the page. Her cut and paste approach, of course, is the direct descendent of Charley Summers' experiments with Rose's old letters (for he too lays 'each snippet on a sheet of newspaper to which he proposed to paste the bits like a telegram' (Ba, pp.121-22)). Like these characters, the novelist's art is one of cutting and reassembling language.

Such self-reflective techniques are central to the *nouveau roman* as well. Sollers prefaces *The Park* with an approving quotation from Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, defining a park as a place 'where everything seems natural except the *assemblage*' (p.6). Or there is Claude Simon's 'assemblage of words' in *The Grass*⁴⁸. *Assemblage* is a particularly redolent trope for the concerns of the *nouveaux romanciers*, since it naturally questions not only the nature of art and reality, but also epitomizes their constructional obsessions. In one of the concurrently-running episodes of *Triptych*, for instance, another of Simon's novels, two boys sort through scraps of film 'which seem to them to have a certain unity and which they are now endeavouring to place in an order that they are still uncertain is the right one'⁴⁹ - the scenes they discover correspond, of course, to the ones recorded in unpredictable, fractured order by Simon's narrative.

Green himself not only likens writing to the process of *assemblage*, but he also includes, in *Doting*, another narcissistic self-representational trope altogether appropriate in his increasingly self-referential vision. For 'Doting' is at once the title

⁴⁸ *The Grass*, trans. by Richard Howard (New York: Braziller, 1960), p.131.

⁴⁹ *Triptych*, trans. by Helen R. Lane (New York: Calder, 1982), p.129.

not only of the main text published under the signature of Henry Green, but also of a set of poems embedded in its text (“Don’t you agree it’s a marvellous title?”, Ann suggests (p.50)), an image of narration within the narrative. But Campbell’s projected anthology (which is itself of course another act of *selection*) has run into trouble: his material, apparently, is proving problematic (“how can this Campbell get stuck over an anthology?” Arthur wonders). And so this anthology, arrested in mid-collation, ironically parallels the inconclusiveness of the novel containing it. Campbell and Green figuratively compete for fictional authority, for the right to compose this text called ‘Doting’.

We find similar clashes of levels of reality in *nouveaux romans*. Nathalie Sarraute’s *Portrait of an Unknown Man* simultaneously designates its narrator and the unidentified portrait hanging in the Louvre (which he, in a further solipsistic twist, identifies himself with); *The Golden Fruits* depicts the rise and fall in reputation of an identically-titled novel; the novel A... is reading in Robbe-Grillet’s *Jealousy* curiously resembles, with its ‘extremely numerous’ variants and a plot apparently similar enough to be discussed ‘as if it is real’ (p.42), the text which frames it; just as in Butor’s *Passing Time* a detective story discovered by the text’s narrator, ‘The Murder of Bleston’, also uncannily duplicates the novel’s plot. Such unsettling mirror texts duplicate and reinforce the central themes of the texts that contain them - in exactly the same fashion that Green uses the *Souvenir* in *Concluding*: as a significant *mise en abîme* which, in artificially cutting the novel in half also thematically relinks them together to provide a subtle continuation of the narrative at the same time as it disrupts and decentres it.

5.3.5 The destruction of time

Place and time are ritualized in Green’s final novels. Their characters meet in codified settings: at ‘the same great hotel’ (*N*, p.82) or ‘the same respectable public house’ (pp.69, 139) that ‘they always used’ (p.233), at ‘the usual table’ (*N*, p.40; *D*, p.155), or at the ‘accustomed [or usual] time and place’ (*D*, pp.94, 108, 123). The majority of *Nothing*’s scenes take place either in this hotel or at Jane’s flat; while *Doting*’s encounters move between a restaurant, the Middleton’s home, and the pub -

a dulling routine of same afternoons (p.80); evenings (pp.38, 54, 162, 171, 177, 205, 215, 226) and nights (pp.183, 191; 'that night' pp.112, 132, 217). *Nothing's* primary rhythm is provided by Jane and John's meetings in her flat, generally separated by other groupings. Green, always fascinated by the essential *sameness*, of objects, encounters, and people (John Haye, for example, rebels early on against 'an existence like this, where day would follow day with nothing to break the monotony' (*BI*, pp.95-96)), intuitively time, in *Nothing* and *Doting*, to be a cyclical, random, and largely anonymous process. The tempo of everyday life is thus rhythmically segmented into coinciding, repetitious units. Bakhtin calls this 'ancillary time', which creates a world in which time has

no advancing historical movement; it moves rather in narrow circles: the circle of the day, of the week, of the month, of a person's entire life [...] Day in, day out the same round of activities are repeated, the same topics of conversation, the same words and so forth (*Dialogic Imagination*, pp. 247-48).

This ritualistic treatment of time sabotages an apparently linear series of events: temporal measurements become spurious and irrelevant - a distrust of time also characteristic of most *nouveaux romans*, where things overlap, repeat, contradict each other, completely blurring temporal distinctions (underlined by the frequency of present tense narration). In *Jealousy*, for example, the crushing of a centipede is said to have taken place 'last week, or at the beginning of the month, perhaps the month before, or later' (p.17). It is then squashed, 'convulsed into a question mark' (p.31), metaphorically reflecting its destabilizing temporal influence on the text. What Green does in these novels is abolish any sense of meaningfulness: while he does not, as most *nouveaux romans* do, experiment with temporal overlaps (perhaps a topic that, after the chronic temporal instabilities of his war novels, Green felt no longer appealing), and indeed adopts an apparently faultlessly linear narrative, the effect of the time formulae, the dulling repetitions, is indeed to advance *beyond* linearity: they instead articulate a peculiarly complex form of endlessly cyclical repetition. His geometries, following Gibson, vitrify space and freeze duration, ensuring 'the repetition of the identical and the rule of the same' (*Towards*, p.14). *Nothing* and *Doting* establish a dulling routine of recurrent events, in which everything happens

the *next* morning (*D*, pp. 78, 214, 223); the *next* afternoon (p.102); the *next* evening/ night (*D*, pp.99, 165); the *next* day (*D*, pp.91, 154, 210; *N*, p.180); *next* Monday (*D*, p.57); *next* Sunday (*N*, pp.161, 219),

or

an hour or two *later* (*D*, p.19); a day or two *later* (*N*, p.144); a few days *later/afterwards* (*D*, pp.22, 35, 42; *N*, pp. 147, 166, 199, 225); in a few days time (*N*, p.213); a few evenings *later* (*N*, p.196); *after* two nights and a day (p.118); a week [or so] *later* (*N*, pp.124, 151, 186, 244); *later* that week (*N*, p.69); a fortnight or so *later* (*N*, p.28, my emphases).

There is no meaningful development apparent: the insertion of terms implying progression ('next', 'later') into practically every temporal expression, successfully devalues their effect, reducing duration to a hypnotic, meaningless blur. The very proliferation of temporal data is counterproductive: these details signify nothing; there is no effective distinction between events an hour or a fortnight apart. After a while each episode, so similar to the last, seems to approximate a perpetual iterative present, so irrelevant are these specific times and locations. As *The Erasers* suggests, time will shortly become irrelevant: events, 'Wrapped in their aura of doubt and error', will, by 'cunningly introducing an occasional inversion, a confusion, a warp', effectively unravel duration (p.3). It is significant that a hall of mirrors stands at the heart of *Nothing*, a place where time is annihilated. The mirrors perpetually reflect the present moment in 'limitless centuries of staring glass', and the narration imagines that, for a moment, they have succeeded in forcing time to "stand still" (p.82). Certainly Green's cast seem temporarily unable to reconstruct the evening's chronology:

It was almost as if, in time, the party had leaped forward between those mirrors so much had been recorded only to be lost, so much champagne had been consumed while, as day passes over a pond, no trace was left in any of their minds, or hardly none (pp.106-7).

The anchoring Sundays at 'The Hotel' in *Nothing* disappear by *Doting*, where all days are indistinguishable from each other. In both texts inexorable patterns create an abstracted and constricting vision of daily existence, a world in which the passage of time is imprisoned within stagnating time formulas - resembling Sartre's vision of a world in *Nausea* in which 'There are no beginnings. Days are tacked onto days

without rhyme or reason, an interminable, monotonous addition'⁵⁰. Green's careful use of duplication in these novels further emphasizes the repetitiveness of the present moments he describes. *Doting*'s final sentence typically anticipates a sequel text that could be written simply starting from the next day, potentially identical in most respects to the one the reader has just finished: 'The next day they all went on very much the same' (p.252). Like an endlessly cyclical nightmare, the text threatens to restart at the beginning again, in much the same way that the text ends as it starts. The cast come together for the annual 'immemorial evening out' of Peter's 'first night of holidays', and ends with an equally symbolic party this time celebrating the end of his holidays.

5.4 SPACE AND SPATIAL DEVICES

5.4.1 From phenomenology to the world of surfaces

Green's abstract geometries steadily flatten the image, in keeping with the new 'surface interpretation'. The debt is, once more, to abstract art: for Green similarly seeks to abolish perspective in the text. His descriptions self-referentially draw the reader's attention to their status as descriptions and to the flatness of the page they are printed on. And he accordingly employs various devices to expose the impossibility of perspective: windows which provide unreal or indistinct views; backgrounds described like theatrical scenery; mirrors which cast the gaze of narration back upon itself. Such devices are particularly characteristic of the *nouveau roman*. Butor, emphasizing the importance of space in the new novel, suggested that the

attention paid to objects necessarily leads to the consideration of the properties of the book itself as an object, to the systematic utilization of its space⁵¹.

⁵⁰ *The Diary of Antoine Roquentin*, trans. by Lloyd Alexander (London: Lehmann, 1949) p.57.

⁵¹ 'Research on the Technique of the Novel', in *Inventory*, pp.15-25 (23).

The characteristic topographical explorations found in the new novel, dubbed by critics the pseudo-objective descriptions of an *école du regard* or 'geometry of objects', similarly invest what they describe with an air of unfamiliarity. The new novelist, Robbe-Grillet asserts, should be 'content just to measure' objects, describing just 'their surface, with no wish to penetrate them, since there is nothing inside them', since they 'reflect nothing but themselves' ('Nature, Humanism', pp.77-78, 94)⁵².

Green and the *nouveaux romanciers*' spatial concerns owe a common debt to the then-dominant philosophical school of phenomenology, which enjoyed widespread popularity during and immediately following the Second World War. Green's war novels, as section 2.4.5 suggests, already contain many typically phenomenological traits. *Nothing* and *Doting* further adapt phenomenological thought as a way of abolishing subjectivity. Like Husserl's idea of 'phenomenological reduction', they strip all overtly subjective elements from the perceptual act. The world of the final novels, as in Sartre's *Nausea*, is 'already there', what Merleau-Ponty calls an 'unalienable presence' which can only be interpreted at face value. We can see this very clearly in an oddity from the late 1940s which *Surviving* has uncovered, a short story called, pregnantly, 'The Great I Eye', dated around the same time as *Concluding*, around two years before *Nothing*. Like the early experimental pieces which bridge the previously considerable gap between *Blindness* and *Living*, this story offers new insight into the evolution of the final theory. Phenomena, it suggests, resist our attempts to describe them. It casts a jaundiced and increasingly uncertain eye at a world of inanimate objects, hallucinated by a drunken man 'in a world of thick pink through which white spots were quickly rising' (p.123). His 'two halcyon eyeballs' are 'lenses like a pushbutton always pressed': an autonomous, quasi-cinematic gaze which rings 'chimes and changes in the brain' (p.121) as it processes what lies in the field of vision. This process, of course, in turn recalls previous instances of phenomenological strangeness: the problems his blinded protagonists encounter with language; the resistance of the Blitz to narration. The I/Eye

⁵² Robbe-Grillet also claimed that his intense scrutiny of things owed much to cinematic observation: 'The slightly unusual appearance of this reproductive world reveals to us, at the same time, the unusual character of the world around us; it too is unusual in so far as it refuses to submit to our habitual ways of understanding and to our notions of order' ('A Path for the Future Novel', p.54).

scientifically collates concrete data through the eyes of this drunken focalizer, although what he records is perceptually distorted.

Nothing and *Doting* go much further than this experimental I/Eye in exploring what Sartre calls the 'fruitful feeling of strangeness'⁵³. As a result of Green's heightened mistrust of narrative description and renewed determination to eliminate all psychological traces from his work, *Nothing* and *Doting* restrict narration to a rigidly external position. The surface point of view accordingly records dialogues faithfully; but all narrative descriptions remain provisional. Objects and movements therefore seem strange: descriptive passages are curtailed and infused by a rigorous attitude of distrust. A prototypical example of this new degree of uncertainty is the spilt coffee incident in *Doting*:

[Arthur] was seated beside the girl but rather too far off. Also this trolley, between the two of them and that fire, was hard by his knees. It *seemed* he could not move over easily [...] Then, *probably because* he was uncomfortable, for *by the looks of it* he had too far to reach to get at her, he dropped the far hand under her legs to lift them over his knees. He drew them unresisting to him, but *must have* forgotten the trolley. For the slow sweep he was imposing on her legs engaged her feet with that trolley and the coffee pot came over on to both. [...] The girl at once jumped to her feet. The trolley almost went into the fire and that coffee pot rolled off their laps on to the floor (p.75, my emphases).

Green's narrative treats people and objects impartially. The repeated definite objects and distancing demonstratives imbue the passage with an air of faint surprise. The elaborate topological treatment and these purely conjectural observations make this account strikingly resemble a painstaking police reconstruction, a hypothetical narrative which seems to have been constructed by examining the scene at a later date. Movements of characters and objects alike seem in slow-motion; mechanical and seemingly inevitable. Green refuses to embellish descriptions: gone is the descriptive richness of his earlier novels, replaced by this studied objectivity. He elsewhere takes exaggerated care to quantify space, noting the 'six feet of space' which separate first Charles and Diana, then Charles and Annabel (*D*, pp. 176, 186), again as if noting the positions of the characters might in some way explain the progression of events. Charles' second attempt to seduce Ann is also narrated from a puzzled distance:

⁵³ *What Is Literature?*, trans. by Bernard Frechtman (London: Methuen, 1950), p.8.

He got up. He came across. He sat on the arm of her chair. He put a hand into her far armpit. [...] He dropped a leg over the side of the chair, began sliding down towards and underneath her. [...] He slid a hand down along her leg, where the skirt ended. She put her free hand to meet it, and laced the fingers into his. Her arm was rigid (pp.189-90).

Each movements is recorded with crisp, pseudo-scientific accuracy; what lies behind the surface data is carefully omitted. The narrating agencies of *Nothing* and *Doting* do not enjoy extensive access, observing from perspectives rarely more privileged than any of the characters. Narrating is defined by position and optical conditions: the

authorial function is largely taken up with the labour of deduction [...] as though the author will only risk himself in interpretation based on the accruelements of surveillance, of what is accountable because it can be *seen* (Mengham, p.125).

What *can* be seen is in question, however, for these narrating agencies are hesitant and myopic, frequently unable to make out characters' expressions, let alone venture opinions on what their dialogues mean. Uspensky writes that it is

characteristic that the observer [...] has assumed a specific position, not abstract, but real; that position is indicated by the fact that there are some things that the observer cannot see from his vantage point⁵⁴.

Expressions are typically at a premium: it is, for example, 'too dark to see the expression' on Mary's face, just as Mary in turn looks 'down but could make out no more than the dark top of [John's] head' (*N*, p.39); assessment of character repeatedly retreats to simple observation of their expressions (*N*, p.52; *D*, p.162). When Diana gets up 'the extremely soft expression on her face was lost as [...] she escaped the faint light which was directed on their table'; it is further noted that the 'cornices, the window embrasures had [...] of course, disappeared in this new darkness' (*D*, p.242).

5.4.2 The mirror as *mise en abîme*

⁵⁴ A *Poetics of Composition: The Structure of the Artistic Text and Typology of a Compositional Form*, trans. by Valentina Zavarin and Susan Wittig (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), p.61.

Mirrors and glass are symbols in *Nothing* and *Doting* which proclaim the triumph of the surface point of view. Their presence is inevitable, given Green's perennial fondness for mirrors, mirror-motifs and doubled images - as Gibson notes, mirrors are 'always a source of fascination' in Green's fiction, so compelled 'to repeat and duplicate' (*RND*, p.120). In the final fiction, however, their use notably increases. Green is interested in their technical possibilities, either to accentuate or question the limits of the represented world or, analogously, as the perfect trope for this new world of surfaces. For these reflecting surfaces mirror the new insistence upon the limits of the observable, of texts which go round in circles and writing which self-consciously discusses itself. Like the novelist's, the mirror's gaze is selective, reflecting objects and people within certain angles of vision, the image decomposed and then recomposed to refract a fragmented version which slightly differs from narrational viewpoint. While they reflect reality *ad infinitum*, the act of reflection flattens what it reflects to exactly the same depth on the mirror's smooth surface, an activity which inevitably parallels Green's own prismatic textual practice. *Nothing's* birthday party, the central set piece of the text, places the cast within a hall of mirrors which perfectly mimic the world of surface appearances that Green creates throughout the novel. The guests gathered in the hotel's function room are endlessly reflected in tall mirrors placed on all the walls. A simple occasion is thus fragmented endlessly into a myriad of surfaces, a potentially limitless, vertiginous world of reflection, of 'space rocketing transparency from one glass silvered surface to the other' (p.82). When Jane enters this room she is 'echoed a thousand thousand times'; when she gets up to congratulate Philip on his engagement her action is repeated or echoed 'a thousand thousand times on all sides' (pp.108, 83). Green, significantly, starts by describing the room before the guests have arrived, noting how the chandeliers repeat 'to a thousand thousand profiles to be lost in olive grey depths as quiet as this room's untenanted attention' (p.82)⁵⁵. This is a perfect metaphor for estrangement, a solipsistic and endlessly repeating space at the heart of a solipsistic text, this enclosed space apparently reflected into infinity as symbolic of Green's

⁵⁵ Things fragmented by optical tricks is a favourite theme: cf. *Loving's* famous description of Kate and Edie waltzing under the chandeliers, 'reflecting in their thousand thousand drops the single sparkle of distant day', these girls 'multiplied to eternity in these trembling pearls of glass' (p.62). Such decompositions of the object are particularly indebted to Cubism, and here as elsewhere Green uses them to emphasize the geometric lines and structures of everyday life.

consciously reduced scope as they are representative of his destruction of time. And, curiously, these mirrors are, like the novelist who looks at them, strangely interested in their powers of reflection. They seem capable of investing inanimate objects with meaning,

insinuating that the process of recording and deleting involves some unfathomable act of cunning on the part of the glass itself [...] Indeed, the mirrors take up meanings that the characters do not reflect upon (Salmon, p.433).

Before the guests finally arrive this room is said to gather itself up, until 'at last [...] Into this waiting shivered one small seen movement that seemed to snap the room apart, a door handle turning' (pp.83, 82). Then, during the party, these mirrors 'watch unseen' proceedings, 'superb but not indifferent', attentive to nuances unnoticed by the characters, 'expressed unheard to be taken up silently again and again in tall mirrors' (pp.82, 89).

Green uses a similar solipsistic trope to conclude *Doting*. Where *Nothing* has one party roughly at the centre of the text, *Doting* opens and closes with, essentially, the same party, celebrating first the start and then the end of Peter's school holidays. At the end the characters all assemble in a new night-club notable for being constructed out 'of plate-glass', which allows its guests not only to have dinner, but also to 'watch all-in wrestlers, dancing or a floor show, at one and the same time' (p.233). Once again, this is a device which emphasizes a variety of possibilities: the implied life in a glass-house; the claustrophobia of being potentially under surveillance from any given angle (the glass does not, for instance, 'have one opening' (p.234)); the self-contained, chinese box-like nature of Green's narrative, and so on.

Within the self-reflexive fictions of the *nouveaux romanciers* the mirror is an equally emblematic device. Butor, in fact, compared the new novel to a search for an ideal reflecting agent:

a mirror in which we not only see ourselves and the author, but a mirror in which we also see the background against which we are set⁵⁶.

For Green and the *nouveaux romanciers* the mirror symbolizes the text's potential for

⁵⁶ quoted by Lucien Dällenbach, *The Mirror in the Text*, p.122.

endless self-duplication, convoluted and labyrinthine (the labyrinth, like Green's effaced cities which lack any sense of topography, dramas enacted in anonymous rooms and exteriors which lack solidity, is a favourite metaphor in the latter's work - settings which resist directions and maps; characters who are imprisoned within their misconceptions; pictures within pictures which question narrative levels of reality).

5.4.3 Textual frames

Mirrors frame and compose scenes, a shared preoccupation of both Green's final novels and those of the *nouveaux romanciers*. This is equally apparent in the use of internal paintings and windows which, like the mirror, create internal frames and boundaries within novels obsessed by space and textual limits. 'Every literary description is a view', Barthes points out; every speaker in a text is always metaphorically standing 'at the window, not so much to see, but to establish what he sees by its very frame' (*S/Z*, p.54). Butor, emphasizing the importance of windows in his own texts, writes that the

window is indeed an image which I cherish. It may or may not let me see beyond it. Window or mirror, it's the symbol of the novel itself - it has its own hardness and through it I plunge, I discover something⁵⁷.

The 'picture within a picture' device delineates the inner and outer thresholds of space, suggesting perspective while defining the 'borders of the representation' (Uspensky, *Poetics*, p.165). Holmesland has noted how windows and frames play an important role in Green's novels, particularly so in *Nothing* and *Doting*, which employ a variety of solipsistic devices - mirrors, windows, paintings - which frame characters and establish lines of perspective in the text. The views provided are typically problematic; either restricted by lack of light or poor weather, or by a focalization drawn to the mirror's surface. The alternation between perspectives of flatness and depth fascinates Green. His narrations get stuck on glass surfaces, as if they are mirrors, rather than looking through them. *Nothing* opens and closes with

⁵⁷ quoted by John K. Simon, p.75.

descriptions of the windows in Jane's flat by night, the 'panes and streets of blue canals' (p.1) at the start, or the 'drops on the dark panes, which were a deep blue of ink' which leave 'small snails' tracks across and down the glass' at the end (p.244). In neither example does the increasingly myopic representation pass beyond the window's surface which, like a mirror, solipsistically reflects the text's gaze back upon the room. *Nothing* repeatedly utilizes internal framing devices (a specifically painterly device for indicating perspective), from the round tables 'set by a great window that opened on the Park' which open the text, to the mirrors in the hotel's ballroom which 'rocket' space between them. Green also draws attention to the paintings which hang on the walls of the Pomfrets' flat. These prove to be framed reproductions - in other words representations of representations. They are furthermore mentioned when the light has dimmed, so that *what* they represent is unclear: they are abstract, 'no more than blurs' in a frame (p.39). When John looks back on the evening he remembers how Mary is "framed in my lovely Matisse over the fireplace, those lozenges of colour perfect as a background" (p.40)⁵⁸. Matisse's abstract 'lozenges of colour' perfectly blend into the fabric of the text, and particularly those vague textual backgrounds.

The idea of the painting as a *mise en abîme* is also dear to the *nouveau roman*, where all such internal representations (paintings, posters, films, photographs) inevitably duplicate aspects of the text and explore the nature of described reality. A cinema poster in *The Voyeur*, like John Pomfret's Matisse, is a mass of indistinct colour, a 'network of curves and angles' which Mathias finds he cannot 'decipher' (p.144), reflecting the angles and obscurities of the novel. They also offer new and exciting geometric opportunities - a 'kind of simultaneous destruction and reconstruction of lines and volumes', according to Claude Simon⁵⁹. Pictures hanging on walls (the painter, of course, also does 'his best on a flat surface' ('ANR', p.137)) have no more depth than views out of windows. In *Party Going* Julia walks past a series of frozen tableaux in Max's hotel room, commenting on them moreover as if they were real (p.92). *Nouveaux romans* frequently confuse one with the other,

⁵⁸ Much of Matisse's work from the late 1940s is in the form of brightly coloured abstract cut paper gouaches pasted onto canvas - a strategy which parallels, of course, Mary's pasting and cutting her newspaper clippings onto sheets of blank paper.

⁵⁹ *The Flanders Road*, trans. by Richard Howard (London: Cape, 1962), p.25.

treating pictures like genuine views or writing narratives which turn out to be descriptions of paintings, in a typical reversal of narrative. We can see this in the paintings in the bedroom of Sollers' *The Park* and in Sarraute's *Portrait of an Unknown Man*, or the tableau 'The Defeat at Reichenfels' in Robbe-Grillet's *In the Labyrinth*. And also, surprisingly, in one of Green's own early short stories, in which a dreaming protagonist steps 'up and into a picture [...] a Boucher Love Affair, quite a good reproduction in its way' ('Adventure', p.10).

A world of unquantified space lies beyond *Nothing*'s windows. When John Pomfret gazes through the hotel's window he sees 'what *looked to be* a white sheet of water from which a few black trees in bud *leaned against* driving rain' (p.41, my emphases). The scene is transfixed: on a 'white sheet' (a typical analogy to the printed text) appear stylized trees, creating an unreal, painted backdrop as if in a theatre or photographer's studio (later, continuing the comparison, thick fog is said to 'curtain from without' (p.161)). *Party Going*'s hotel windows, similarly, have curtains 'so thick and heavy they seemed made of plaster on stage sets' (p.149). The perspectives provided by *Nothing* and *Doting* are illusory, these references to painted back-cloths or curtains suggesting a deliberately theatrical awareness of the unreality of the artistic work. The narrating agency of *Nothing* alludes to the 'conductor out of sight in the prompter's box' (p.147); in *Doting* the plate-glass partitions in the night-club blur the distinction between audience and performer. We find the same fascination with the unreal in the *nouveau roman*: the snow which falls in *In the Labyrinth* destroys the streets' 'spectacular perspectives', 'removing all depth from the landscape as if this blurred view were a badly painted *trompe l'oeil* on a flat wall' (p.12), just as later the view is compared to one in an old-fashioned photographer's studio, revealing 'a pseudo-verandah with trees and a park painted on a *trompe l'oeil* backcloth' (p.57), or that the barracks windows are possibly 'fake, just thickly outlined rectangles divided into six by thinner strokes' (p.88).

Beyond the immediate zones of Green's characters space is petrified, just as all movement within *Nothing* and *Doting* is deliberately stylized and anti-representational. In these texts movement tends to zero, as much a series of frozen narrational recreations as Green's descriptions. When Jane rises to her feet at the hotel party, she is refracted in that hall of mirrors, her 'movement repeated a thousand thousand times'. As she crosses the room the moment is 'transfixed', and

she moves 'afloat between one tall mirror and the other' (N, p.108). Jane is described, appropriately enough, as resembling a 'picture' or a 'painting' in doing this: Green approximates a sort of frozen *tableau vivant*. Philip and Mary 'take trains' rather like the inhabitants of *Doting* take taxis: the stating of the situation suffices; it is not of interest to the narrative, it is, simply, the *convention* of movement. Philip's trip to Brighton is particularly curious, for this is stylized to such an extent that he appears to have simply walked past a painted screen:

he came to a *pewter sea* on which a tramp steamer was *pushing* its black smoke out in front and he had to *lean himself against* wind and rain (pp.55-56, my emphases).

Reality freezes into the immobility of a painting, the stiffness of the description suspending motion. *Blindness*, like 'Adventure in a Room', offers another remarkably vivid prefiguration of Green's later non-representational interests. Its section titled 'Postcard' describes a painting in an old almanac, a warship

cutting rigid water shavings in the sea, with smoke hurrying frozenly out of its funnels, and with a torpedo caught into eternity (p.107).

The smoke in both descriptions is particularly reminiscent of one of de Chirico's transfixed steam-engines⁶⁰: a deliberately static situation typical of Green's work, which is as we have seen imaginatively drawn to lulls and oppressive enclosures. A similar passage in *Doting* draws the reader's attention to the interior of Charles and Arthur's club:

tall windows, *leaning against* rain, seemed to filter light back [...] to make a number of men [...] appear as wraiths, thin before illness, and bloodless as cardboard (p.120, my emphasis).

The phrasing is deliberately artificial, and the indistinctness of vision regarding peripheral elements to the story persists. This is altogether typical: the world

⁶⁰ De Chirico claimed his inspiration came from a winter's day at Versailles (oddly enough also the location for Robbe-Grillet's collaborative film with Alain Resnais, *L'Année dernière à Marienbad*), when for a moment he felt as if the scene before him had frozen: 'Everything gazed at me with mysterious, questioning eyes [...] At that moment I grew aware of the mystery which urges man to create certain structural forms' (quoted in *Theories of Modern Art: A Source Book by Artists and Critics*, ed. by Herschel Browning Chipp (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), p.402).

immediately beyond the personal spaces of the characters in these novels is always static or unclear. In a rare scene outside the interior rooms usually occupied by Green's characters, Philip and Mary meet in 'Hyde Park'. But it seems unreal, and could be anywhere: no distinguishing details are noted, and the only time their surroundings come into focus is when they notice a dog swimming 'to a thrown branch *in the foreground*' (N, p.144, my emphasis). By flattening space Green erases the distinction between foreground and background, stressing the artificiality of all textual horizons.

Green effectively destroys narrative description in this fashion, emphasizing the sheer fictionality of the world described. The world of the final novels is descriptively flat: the narration inevitably reflects back on itself and the act of writing, the arrangement of words on the flat surface of the page - as Chatman writes, the 'verbal descriptum, like the painting, has only one surface: there is, essentially, no "behind"'⁶¹. Words, Green suggests, are what separates his characters from the void around them, and, by extension, his fiction too stands out against the silence beyond: there is nothing beyond the text, no reality outside narration itself. This obsession with words and blankness (Green's metaphor for writing, the symbols projected onto a blank piece of paper) becomes increasingly solipsistic, increasingly abstracted - characters who have no apparent pasts or futures outside the text; backgrounds which do not exist; movement which has become transfixed or paralysed.

5.5 TOWARDS THE VOID

5.5.1 The void beyond

The void is a resonant theme in the literature of the post-war period, particularly prominent both in Green's later works and those of the *nouveaux romanciers*. *Nothing* and *Doting*'s claustrophobic rooms, faceless public buildings and characterless civic spaces create a series of hermetic enclosures which are practically indistinguishable from one another. Green's city is, barring the carefully unreal

⁶¹ *Coming to Terms: The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film* (London: Cornell University Press, 1990), p.32.

description of Hyde Park, a labyrinthine space of interchangeable places where dialogues happen (naturally a favourite *nouveau roman* analogy). Space beyond these oppressive interiors is unrealised: a void on the peripheries of vision. The only quantifiable spaces are the personal spaces of Green's characters, who drift between largely featureless flats and the pubs, restaurants, hotels, or night-clubs they frequent. In the unfamiliar surroundings of Brighton, Mrs Weatherby's first impulse is to hunt out the nearest personal space, locating, on the fringe of the hotel reception, 'a corner from which she could not be observed' (*N*, p.56). To realise space, Green acknowledges, you need light, and space in *Nothing* and *Doting* is measured accordingly. Everything which lies beyond these typically brightly lit interiors is characteristically shadowy or dark. Earlier explorations of fictional space in *Loving* (1945) and *Concluding* (1948) similarly contrast detailed interiors against worryingly indistinct outer zones. The grounds of Kinalty are separated by a 'tumbledown wall' from a menacingly vague outside world; *Concluding*'s Institute has its own perimeter wall beyond which lies, in Sebastian's words, a "periphery of outer darkness" (p.117). The Institute itself is said to have been created "out of a void" (Kinalty, similarly, is "a desert of a place" (*Lo*, p.188)), and its principals declare that it was "a vacuum indeed when we first came" (pp.210-11). Both walls are less to keep intruders out than to make their inhabitants feel safe within, demarcating the boundary between familiar personal space and hostile, unmeasured zones. Here and in the final fiction, therefore, enclosed spaces form the text's internal boundaries, and whenever characters step beyond them they approach the void. Green's fictional worlds are, as Simon's *The Palace* suggests, 'a void furnished with random objects, furniture, human beings'⁶². *Loving* stresses the difference between things inside and outside, and fears being "the wrong side of the window". Green's texts typically explore the tension between open and closed form -agoraphobia on the one hand, and claustrophobia on the other. His houses and interiors map and enclose space, marking it off from the surrounding void, just as his characters cling desperately to self-delineated private spaces which keep the threatening outside world at bay. The characters of *Nothing* and *Doting*, working for shadowy extensions of the same socialist bureaucracy satirized in *Concluding*, muddle through in a straitened

⁶² *The Palace*, trans. by Richard Howard (1962, London: Cape, 1964), p.106.

universe of rationing and diminished expectation which, although identified in both texts as London in the late 1940s, takes place against an abstract, theatrical backdrop similar to Beckett's bleak landscapes (places where there is 'no lack of void'), and the Sartrean phenomenological universe (where 'Being is there, and outside of it - Nothing')⁶³.

5.5.2 Self-conscious attenuation

The characters of Green's final novels articulate the vocabulary of the void, discussing at inordinate and self-conscious length their own sense of inanimation. John Pomfret declares that "we never can seem to do anything" (*N*, p.95), and his friends worry about a future without prospects or possibility of change ("like a dip into the future, every hope gone" (p.6)). This bleakness is particularly apparent in *Doting*, whose characters spend much of their time earnestly wondering if anything will happen in their lives:

"Well, in that case, where are we?"

"Where we've always been" (p.178, Diana and Arthur);

"But I don't see this story of yours. I mean, does it get anywhere?"

"Only as far as one wants to, I suppose" (p.241, Claire and Ann).

As the second party drags on, they half-heartedly imagine escaping the tedium of the occasion:

"Why shouldn't we just leave?"

"Go? But nothing's even begun yet!" [...]

"When, in the end, are they going to start?" [...]

"In their own good time, I suppose. Like everyone else" (pp.236, 240: Diana and Peter).

And things never really do get off the ground: the novel begins and ends with grim parties; Annabel and Arthur's "affair", despite the shock-waves it generates in the text, is half-hearted and disastrous, stressing the inconsequentiality of the whole. As

⁶³ *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. with an intro. by Hazel E. Barnes (London: Methuen, 1957), p.xvi.

Ann confides in Claire, “all this I’ve been telling you will probably come to nothing, of course” (p.66). And Arthur discusses the very same state of affairs with Charles: “there’s nothing to it?”, wonders his friend; Arthur replies, “Well, not so far. I mean, there’s been nothing yet” (p.120). And so things will indeed most likely go ‘on very much the same’ (p.252). “What’s happening?”, Claire asks Ann sometime later. “Nothing, simply nothing! Which is the whole point”, she replies: the ‘whole point’ being, of course, that nothing definitive can or will happen, either in Green’s text or in these endlessly self-referential *mise en abîme* dialogues. Since the newly dialogic text keeps descriptive passages to a minimum, all that is left is conversation. These discussions seem often as interminable to Green’s characters as to the reader. They talk to allay fears of boredom and nothingness, to fill the emptiness of silence, as much as to communicate (Green’s characters rarely listen to each other anyway; in *Doting*, moreover, they constantly worry about ‘boring’ each other). *Nothing* opens with John and Liz gossiping along clearly time-worn lines over an equally customary Sunday lunch: when these automatic routines which sustain conversation are exhausted, Liz concludes in mock-despair “We’ve been over every one of your other friends haven’t we” (p.6). This is what Ann suggests in *Doting*: there is little else to say: “What’s so extraordinary is, they never seem to say anything different” (p.36). As Robert Langbaum writes of Beckett’s characters, ‘these people need to be seen, heard, remembered, need above all to talk, in order to assure themselves they exist’⁶⁴. Green’s characters, talking incessantly, fear the silences in the gaps between dialogues. For silence reveals the void, a void which can only be averted by language. And so they simply continue talking: the final sentences of *Doting*, Green’s last observation as a novelist, sees the grumbling Middletons riding home in a taxi, arguing all the way, with the promise that ‘The next day they all went on very much the same’ (p.252).

Oddvar Holmesland suggests that

the sadness and terror of the surrounding existential void seem to be the underlying motivational forces behind their endless lunches, gossips, affairs, intrigues, and their way of making “mountains out of molehills” (a favourite expression by which they characterize one another’s pastimes) (Holmesland, p.213).

⁶⁴ *The Mysteries of Identity: A Theme in Modern Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p.121. The narrator of *The Unnamable* puts it, ‘I have no voice and must speak, that is all I know’ (*Trilogy*, p.281).

The glumness of *Nothing*, and especially *Doting*, strike a contemporary post-war chord. Sartre claimed existentialism addressed the post-war despair of the individual. Certainly Green's own version of late 1940s existence is comparably grim. *Nothing's* John Pomfret, having fought in North Africa, returns 'plumb through the desert' (p.14) to the city, but exchanges one type of aridity for another. Green articulates the spiritual impoverishment of characters who, sensing the futility lurking beneath their social existence, "go on very much the same" day after day, conspicuously deficient in self-belief. And so we find John Pomfret self-pityingly telling Liz, "I struggle on alone" (*N*, p.41); or Ann declaring to Arthur, "I've simply no one, and nothing" (*D*, p.53). Ann and Claire's catch-phrase, being 'expendable', appropriately underlines the sense of despair these texts articulate, their characters living by default and with a clear sense of diminished responsibilities and of the hollowness of their lives.

Both 'nothing' and 'doting' are terms of attenuation, verbs appropriately arrested in development. Indeed, "doting" provides a particularly depressing central motif: Green's characters, suspicious of their own feelings, emotionally indulge themselves in order to temporarily side-step the depressing reality of their loveless lives - an incapacity symbolized by the replacement of loving by doting ("Loving goes deeper" (p.50, my emphasis). Annabel, the centre of the novel's sexual intrigues, tellingly thinks love is "squalid", confiding to Claire that "I'm very much afraid the whole old rigmarole is about to start all over, once more" (p.63). All of *Doting's* recurring discussions about love and happiness are as trivial and depressing as this example illustrates:

"Then why is it, Arthur, you don't even wish me to stay happy, enjoy myself?" she asked.
 "Surely those things are quite distinct and separate?"
 "How could they be? If any one is happy she enjoys herself, no one can get away from that!"
 "Yet if you are enjoying yourself, you needn't necessarily be happy," he objected.
 "Well, I think you're just splitting hairs" (p.168).

5.5.3 Approaching zero

'*Nothing is more real than nothing*', Beckett's Malone emblematically declared (*Malone Dies*, *Trilogy*, p.177). Green's own work seems often equally preoccupied with this state, particularly *Doting*, which actually advocates betting on nothing. Green, taking his analogy from roulette, has Charles tell Ann:

"If you're on a number and there's a run on zero, where are you then? [...] you can back any number up to thirty seven, and in combinations, but if the ball falls into a slot on the wheel which is marked nought, everyone loses who hasn't betted on zero".
"I still can't seem to see why a person should want to put their money on nothing".
"Because it's precisely what they may get" (pp.140-41).

This represents an imaginative commitment to zero. The analogy is moreover all the more pointed for being yet another self-referential device, the ball circling the roulette wheel mirroring the juggler, the idea of activity on the margins with the centre of the text intact, and so on. It sums up the pervasive pointlessness of their social existence: Green's post-war Londoners find sensory gratification increasingly hard to achieve, and they are markedly unambitious. Their world revolves around dreary jobs and repetitive social encounters: they are, in effect, close to running on empty. As Charles explains, "the spin of the wheel is all anyone of us can expect". *Nothing* and *Doting* morbidly dwell on the state of nothingness: the last spoken words in *Nothing* are John Pomfret's who, appropriately, murmurs that he wants "Nothing... nothing" (p.247), while *Doting* is full of choric dialogues celebrating impoverishment:

"the ideas one marries with, soon merge into the ideas one remains married on" [...]
"Then it must be frightful to be married!" [...]
"At times, possibly" [...]
"So what ought one to do [...] about marriage?"
"Nothing, darling. Drift" (p.111);

"just don't expect too much".
"And mustn't I even hope for the best?" she wailed.
"Can't stop people hoping," he agreed, "Don't advise you to, all the same" (p.143, Charles and Ann).

As in Eliot's *East Coker*, which talks of a 'Twenty years largely wasted', the sense of failure haunts Green's characters. As Arthur asks Diana: "what are you trying to insinuate? That we've been failures?" "Not at all", she replies gloomily, "Just, we might have gone somewhere further, that's all!" (*D*, p.134). Their children's

generation is equally fatalistic: when Arthur self-pityingly suggests to Ann that ““You’ve still got everything in front of you””, she swiftly trumps his insincere optimism: ““What good’s that? [...] It might turn out to be cancer”” (p.25). Philip and Mary make an uninspiring couple and their engagement singularly joyless (as Philip confesses, he has ““nowt to offer”” (N, p.237)). Green’s texts depict the “dangerous age” of middle-aged existence, laden with dull and problematic children (who, as ““they grow older [...] make you feel so aged”” (D, p.17)), and sated by boredom and overwork (Diana wearily asks Arthur, ““Can we go on like this? [...] can all your terrific work be worth the candle?”” (p.133)). Such dialogues travel in circles, despite their length rarely advancing the story. Many of *Doting*’s conversations collapse into ritualized arguments about the vicissitudes of marriage and middle-age (““the minute one begins a discussion of mutual troubles or miseries, it invariably becomes a kind of fierce competition as to who, in effect, is the worse off”” (p.52)).

The threat of physical disintegration - a constant theme in Green’s irrepressibly pessimistic work - is again marked in *Nothing* and *Doting*, whose predominantly elderly casts dread a future which seems only to promise infirmity, physical disfunctionality, or death (which, coupled with the abstract backgrounds and emphasis upon talk, makes comparisons to Beckett’s bleak domains inevitable). Behind the empty social rituals lurks entropy (quite literally, in the disturbing place-name card of a long-dead friend which unaccountably turns up with the place-settings in *Nothing*’s party sequence), and Arthur Morris’ macabre fate, slowly reduced limb-by-limb, serves as a constant reminder that one ““Can’t tell where these things’ll stop”” (N, p.13). John Pomfret develops diabetes during the novel, weakened ‘like a sponge’ (p.203), his insulin injections - ““terrible pricks all over his poor arms and legs”” (p.188) - reminding Jane of her mother who ““sat on a pin [...] it travelled all over, just think, and then when she died she had pernicious anæmia after all”” (p.193). As Liz sums up, ““it makes one wonder who will be next?”” (p.200): the cast of *Nothing* indeed fear in conclusion: ““is there to be nothing but illness from now on?”” (p.195).

5.6 FROM ABSTRACTION TO SILENCE

5.6.1 Green's theory and the implications of abstraction

Nathalie Sarraute tempered her admiration for Green's achievements in his late theory and practice by suggesting that he nevertheless seemed to lack the full courage of his convictions. In proclaiming her own similarly dialogic future novel she added:

Perhaps, too, after making this bold statement, Henry Green experienced a certain fear: if he were to carry his investigation too far, where would it not lead him? Might he not eventually come to ask himself if this single indication of his were not a sign of profound disturbances that could lead to reexamination of the entire tradition of the novel? Might he not end by claiming that contemporary novel forms are cracking on all sides, and thus instigate, even invite, new techniques adapted to new forms? ('Conversation and Sub-Conversation', pp.102-3).

Green's new poetics, Sarraute sensed, were fundamentally flawed, undermined for her by his refusal to fully implement his new theories. Certainly Green's 'English Novel of the Future' leaves the new novelist gingerly tiptoeing through a minefield of demands and dangers; obliged to create life in the reader, yet severely restricted in his tools; to be simultaneously 'not clear', yet engage with the reader; to articulate a private world which is nevertheless universal or 'diffuse... as life itself'; to stick to dialogues which nevertheless must give 'no direct answers'; to struggle with the intangible ('unspoken speech'), yet equally combat 'the natural fatigue of the reader' over such inconclusiveness; let alone be constantly alert to 'the dangers involved', the threats which the writer must be 'wily enough' to circumvent ('ENF', pp.22-24).

Green's critical essays repeatedly dwell upon the strategic risks of abstraction. The experimental novelist, he suggests,

must take care not to let it go too far [...] Because it then becomes a private communication with himself, like a man making cat's cradles with spider's webs, a sort of Melanesian gambit ('AF', p.245).

A strangely compacted metaphor for a curiously ambivalent approach. 'The English Novel of the Future' dwells morbidly on the fate of the very writers Green seeks to emulate. For these all overreached themselves, in Green's opinion: Joyce and Picasso go 'so far that the effort to assimilate them has become too great'; Henry James becomes a prisoner of his manner (so that his prose 'at the end of his life became virtually meaningless'); George Moore is said to have 'polished his prose to such a

degree that it is almost meaningless' ('ENF', pp.23, 22). Green cites them as predecessors similarly extending the boundaries of fiction, yet in the same breath seems already to acknowledge his own inevitable failure.

The sudden emphasis upon theory seems as much in illustration of the cliché that when a writer begins to try and explain or justify his art, it is a sure sign that his invention is either flagging, or that he has almost reached as far as he can go. Certainly the over-theorizing, the 'dissolution of the "web of insinuations" into explanations' (Salmon, p.ix), and the lean years which followed, the novels that were never realized and the desultory articles instead intermittently published all suggest Green never satisfactorily accepted the *inevitability* of his fictional advances. This unwillingness highlights the difference between Green and the *nouveaux romanciers*. John Rajchman, discussing Deleuze's idea of "affirmative machines", suggests that successful abstraction can push art beyond thanks to a 'strange anorganic vitality able to see in "dead" moments other new ways of proceeding' - an important goal for the new novelists, but a step Green was unable to take⁶⁵. In 1961 Robbe-Grillet would write that

we are more and more moving towards an age of fiction in which the problems of writing will be lucidly envisaged by the novelist, and in which his concern with critical matters, far from sterilising his creative faculties, will on the contrary supply him with motive power⁶⁶.

For Green artistic stalemate, not motive power, was the result. His theoretical articles at once proclaim that the novel must be abstract, yet fear this same abstraction, for all his analogies about "going beyond" the novel. *Nothing* and *Doting* distrust description, but are nevertheless unwilling to dispense with it altogether (novels need 'occasional descriptive passages too, to link the dialogue' ('JL', p.164)): Green wishes to recede behind dialogue, but can't quite bring himself to remove linking prose. For 'there must be stage directions', 'there must be some description of the movements made', and 'the reader must at least be told who is speaking' ('DL', p.87, 'ANR', p.142). No sooner does Green announce the future supremacy of the dialogic novel than he qualifies his own rhetoric, suggesting, somewhat offhandedly, that his project may itself be merely an intermediary stage,

⁶⁵ *Constructions* (London: M. I. T. Press, 1998), p.61.

⁶⁶ 'The Use of Theory' [1955], in *Snapshots*, pp.43-49 (46-47).

until in a few years' time someone will think up something better [...] it seems almost impossible to write entirely by unspoken dialogue ('ANR', p.140).

"Unspoken dialogue" - Green does not exactly mean some sort of mystical telepathic communication between writer and reader - here refers to the 'kind of unspoken communion' between the two which he desires to emerge out of the surface talk recorded in print ('a silent communion with the symbols which are printed to make up the words' (p.140)). It is a fascinating, nigh-attenuated vision, that "life which is not" of written prose, yet still able to kindle a spark in the reader and be reconstituted, 'sufficiently alive', in his audience (the reconciliation of scepticism of words and language as an inadequate resource, with the paradoxical fact that language remains the medium the novelist must work with, is a typical paradox in avant-garde writing).

Whether Green fully convinced himself about his new fictional dictates therefore remains somewhat unclear. He is in *Nothing* and *Doting* prepared to forfeit many of the advantages previously chipped away at in his earlier novels, and what he has to say about the inevitability of the abstractions of other modernist forbears certainly confirms that he saw a similar trajectory in his own progression. The distrust of language, of narrating itself; the refusal to access characters; the steady simplification of plot: all are present in varying degrees in his earlier novels. The problems which the final novels create, however, are tied up with the nature of Green's change in heart. The unstable vision was previously organic, Green's unstable idioms and fluctuating strategies all, as we have seen, characteristically random, whereas the theory imposes a method of reading upon *Nothing* and *Doting*. It adds rigid constraints where previously protean impulses existed; and, crucially, it suppresses many of Green's natural inclinations.

Firstly there is Green's attitude to language and narration. His work, as we have seen, gradually forgoes the pleasures of linguistic exuberance - of words which *exceed* the communicational minimum - in favour of the flat, functional prose which *Nothing* and *Doting* are restricted to. And so the florid colours and unstable idioms of the earlier fiction disappear, replaced by a monochromatic world of form and structure. But, having decided to abandon the 'few but highly pointed descriptions',

Green noted that he had subsequently 'tried to keep everything down to bare dialogue and found it very difficult ('AF', p.240). The statement acknowledges this tension between doctrine and inclination: choosing to dispense with those 'few, highly pointed descriptions' on the one hand reflects the abstract ideal of a novel as spare and figurative as a collection of stylized lines; on the other, the regret, the difficulty Green finds taking this step demonstrates how his desire for abstraction does, in practice, conflict with his own instinctive manner.

Secondly, Green's old humanism - which is to say, his feeling of class solidarity, his genuine interest in *people* - is largely submerged by abstraction. As in the gradual rejection of language, this is tied in to Green's developing distrust of the very concept of 'character': the progression to the attenuated vision of the final novels is from this point of view entirely logical. But the scepticism goes too far. Green's "step further" towards the void increasingly fails to distinguish between people and inanimate objects. *Doting* repeatedly uses definite articles, referring to *the* wife, *the* son, *the* spouse, *the* husband (even *the* Paynton). The text opens with Arthur's verdict on the play they have just watched ("squalid") and Peter's response ('His son only grunted back at him, face vacant, mouth half open, in London, in 1949'). The language conveys disgust and weariness, a discouraging negativity the consequence of getting nearer to the void intimated in *Nothing*. The aesthetic pleasures of form no longer compensate for the very loss of vitality Green himself regarded as the inevitable sign of creative decay. For *Doting* is a decidedly Beckettian end game, perhaps inevitably so given that Green's striving for purity of expression celebrates form for its own sake. The building blocks of the future novel suggest texts given over altogether to the pleasures of limitation, geometry and construction: increasingly absent from *Doting* is the human element. Green compared *Nothing* and *Doting* to the abstract simplicity of line achieved in Chinese classical painting, a comparison which Beckett also interestingly uses to articulate a modish minimalism, talking approvingly with Georges Duthoit of modern art's desire to 'paint the void', and express the 'inner emptiness, the prime condition, according to Chinese esthetics, of the act of painting'⁶⁷.

Green's theoretical writing is, therefore, ambivalent about the abstract quest. As

⁶⁷ *Proust and Three Dialogues with Georges Duthoit* (London: Calder & Boyars, 1965), p.109. The quotation refers to Masson's paintings.

Sarraute suggested, Green hesitated to embrace the obvious consequences of the unstable vision in its final form. Having taken the novel 'beyond', he then tries to rescue the situation. The corollary of the unstable vision is *Nothing* and *Doting*; yet the novels are, paradoxically, also protections against that same instability which produces them. While *Nothing* and *Doting* strip the novel down to a language of abstract forms, Green appears uncertain of the implications of his protective geometries. To what extent the surface approach and supremacy of form provide an insulation against an increasingly disheartening world is unacknowledged: the unstable vision ends up by protecting itself against itself, geometry a new form of 'solitary self-control'. His glacial geometries contain the very fluctuation which ensures his art: going beyond the unstable vision results in its destruction - symbolized of course by the fact that *Doting* is more or less the same, only more lifeless, as *Nothing*.

5.6.2 Striving for silence

Barthes writes that, in a 'perpetual flight forward from a disorderly syntax, the disintegration of language can only lead to the silence of writing'⁶⁸: Green's abstract path would lead to a similar impasse, even if this did seem to take him by surprise. Not so the *nouveaux romanciers*, however: as Ihab Hassan suggests in his book *The Literature of Silence*, 'the French anti-novels of Sarraute, Butor, and Robbe-Grillet aim, like the new cinema, at the effect of a silent reel'⁶⁹. An assessment that they would probably have concurred with; as Philippe Sollers indeed theorized,

one writes in order gradually to silence oneself, to obtain the written silence of memory that paradoxically translates the world in its ciphered movement, this world of which each of us is the dissimilated and irreducible cipher⁷⁰.

It is perhaps also significant that, while Sarraute and Simon continued to publish

⁶⁸ *Writing Degree Zero and Elements of Semiology*, trans. by Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (London: Cape, 1984), pp.62-63.

⁶⁹ *The Literature of Silence: Henry Miller and Samuel Beckett* (New York: Knopf, 1967), p.12.

⁷⁰ *Writing and the Experience of Limits*, ed. by David Hayman and trans. with Philip Barnard (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p.195.

their distinctive fictions throughout the 1960s, both Butor and Robbe-Grillet instead moved further away from writing orthodox novels, producing, like other writers of the time, collage works, photo- or cine-novels; quite literally, new techniques for new forms. Abstraction has its own momentum: the 'permutating series' and 'circular structures' of modern art, Deleuze suggests, inevitably lead

to the abandonment of representation [...] The idea of the object read really dissolves into divergent series defined by esoteric words, just as the identity of the reading subject is dissolved into the decentred circles of possible multiple readings⁷¹.

At no point in his theory does Green acknowledge that the inevitable destination of his new strategies would logically be the abandonment of representation, the end of writing. *Nothing* and *Doting*, however, suggest differently. Not only is the despair of his characters tangible, but the novels themselves contain curious tropes of artistic silence. The juggler in *Doting* is, like the forgotten writer Rock, highly emblematic - a silent artist, whose 'miracles of skill spun out a few feet beneath' are 'altogether ignored' - who uncannily prefigures Green's subsequent status: a novelist unable to write novels, forced to renounce the blunted instruments of words, and building instead extravagant imaginary structures in the air. Juggling suggests that fiction is a performance, and as such cannot be maintained indefinitely. The juggler must either cease to keep his balls in motion, or, losing concentration, the whirling objects will drop to the floor and the illusion will shatter. In similar fashion the narrator of *Nothing* refers to himself as 'the conductor out of sight in the prompter's box' (p.147), the unseen orchestrator of the narrative. Both figures symbolically enact 'end games', the self-destructive impulse of fiction via the adoption of silence - just as both this juggler and the belly dancer with her mechanical snakes, the two performing artists who appear in *Doting*, also suggest how art can become arid and sterile; their performances in effect confidence tricks, sleights of hand and vision which even their audience sense are inadequate. The dancer comes on to 'scant applause' (p.2), the conjuror also 'to no applause' (p.7); and both finish their performances having lost the attention of Green's cast ('the act beneath they'd ceased to watch' (p.5), or the juggler, 'unnoticed by our party' (p.8)). "“Oh God”", Peter

⁷¹ *Difference and Repetition*, trans. by Paul Patton (London: Athlone Press, 1990), p.69.

exclaims in disgust when the magician makes his second appearance, and the party walks out - deserting the writer, as it were, on the last page of his text, as if in protest at the reader's 'disgust' or 'low opinion' of the future novel's new, abstracted content.

With the last of his critical statements the collapse of the unstable vision would be complete. Having advanced to an abstract point which anticipates the work of the *nouveaux romanciers*, Green found himself without room to manoeuvre. Having once profited from instability, he now sought to contain it, with disastrous results. In October 1950 he wrote presciently that

I write at night and at weekends. I relax with drink and conversation [...] And so I hope to go till I die, rather sooner now than later. There is no more to say ('HG', pp.131-32)⁷².

This, curiously, before *Doting*, rather than after. After *Doting* statements and practice are split between contradictory strategies. A literature of refusal left Green anything but stimulated in the years following *Doting*. 'I simply can't do it anymore', he complained to Alan Ross: 'The older you get the harder it is' ('GWE', p.72). Green's mood ('there is no more to say'; 'the older you get the harder it is') uncannily prefigures similar statements made by Samuel Beckett. Beckett could of course derive some degree of satisfaction from the equally bleak realisation that 'There is nothing to express' (*Proust and Three Dialogues*, p.103). His *Unnamable* talks 'to prevent this discourse coming to an end', in a text which famously concludes 'in the silence you don't know, you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on' (*Trilogy*, p.382). But Beckett did himself turn away from the format of the novel, writing in 1956 that the completion of the *Trilogy* had

brought me to the point where I felt I was saying the same thing over and over again. For some authors writing gets easier the more they write. For me it gets more and more difficult. For me the area of possibilities gets smaller and smaller [...] There is no way to go on⁷³.

⁷² The whole piece is extremely Beckettian: cf. *The Unnamable*, which reads 'it's only natural [...], you want yourself in your own little corner, [...] you're tired, you want to stop, travel no more, seek no more, lie no more, speak no more, close your eyes' (*Trilogy*, p.368).

⁷³ quoted in Ihab Hassan, *The Literature of Silence*, p.194.

Doting achieves a similar impasse: Green never attempted another novel after it, according to his son ('Memoir', p.299). He instead started to look beyond the novel. The modern writer, he felt, must be on the look-out 'for other media these days': that it 'might be better to ask if novels will continue to be written' ('AF', p.248). He started two plays, neither of which were ever staged (despite having earnestly argued against conflating the new dialogic novel with drama in the 'Novelist to His Readers' talks; *Surviving* preserves the very poor 'Journey Out of Spain'). Other pieces, tellingly, contain no trace of the theoretical asceticism proclaimed in the early 1950s: a 1952 article commissioned for *Vogue* ('Invocation to Venice') adopts a preposterously overblown prose which, after the ascetic renunciation of description imposed by the theory on *Nothing* and *Doting*, is shocking in its sheer surplus; 'The Jealous Man', rejected by the *New Yorker* in 1954, puzzlingly restores a garrulous first person narrator. A sense of frustration runs through many of his later, frequently maudlin interviews or articles: the self-pitying of a self-consciously older generation, the museum pieces Plomer refers to, 'the thin-blooded, who have been in two wars', and who 'have not much left' ('Unloving', p.282). In 1960 'An Unfinished Novel' exhumed the abandoned 'Mood', this discussion of an 'unfinished unfinishable novel' unavoidably evoking the ghosts of Green's own abandoned projects of the 1950s. It presciently notes the 'lack of animation, which is probably the first sign of dissolution, the seeds of death there is in every work of art' ('UN', p.258), spelling out the dangers of abstraction quite clearly: all texts can potentially self-destruct. The novel, he asserts, had become unwriteable, 'an impossible project for the novelist' (p.256). Having suppressed instability by pushing his work to an extreme, Green found himself unable to continue as a novelist. 'Green can write novels', he gloomily concluded in 1963, 'but his present difficulty is to know quite how to do it' ('FJA', p.284). The unstable vision had, effectively, achieved precisely what Green feared: progressive experimentation reducing the novel to a point where there was, for him, nothing more to express.

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